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HOME & THE HOMELESS.

A NOVEL.

BY CECILIA MARY CADDELL,

Authoress of "THE LITTLE SNOWDROP," "BLIND AGNESE," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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HOME AND THE HOMELESS.

CHAPTER I.

“WHERE is Mr. Sutherland, I wonder?” said Evelyn de Burghe, as she seated herself behind the massive silver urn which was already hissing on the table, and prepared to fulfil her appointed duties as tea-maker general to the party assembled at the ‘Ferns.’

The speaker, a tall, elegant looking woman, appeared to be about five-and-twenty years of age, she might have been a little more, or a little less, but unless she chose to tell, it would have been impossible to say which; for tho’ her form

had developed itself into a graceful fulness, apparently incompatible with the first years of girlhood, yet, the softness of her skin, and the exceeding purity of her complexion, involuntarily suggested the idea of that season of youth, when beauty is like a rose-bud just unfolded, ere sun or shower or careless breezes have had power to ruffle its leaves, or to dim its brightness. Her soft dark hair, black, but with the blue shadow of the raven's wing brightening over its heavy masses, was banded simply on a brow broad and high, and telling of a queenly intellect within, while the eye-brows nearly straight, but clearly defined and delicately pencilled, gave, as it were, with their look of calm decision, an index to the volume. The eyes that shone beneath were deeply, beautifully blue, and looked all the more so from the long dark lashes that swept her cheek like a silken curtain whenever her looks went downwards. When in repose, the expression of the whole face was often pensive almost to sadness, but it lightened and sparkled into child-like gaiety the moment she began to speak, it was as if a cloud had been suddenly

lifted from off her spirit, or as if in the effort to forget, she had not merely put aside a painful recollection, but had banished it for the moment altogether.

The room in which she sat, on the morning we have introduced her to our readers, was no unfitting setting for so fair a gem. It was intended for a library, but books were mingled with flowers and pictures, and all the lighter industries of woman's leisure hours, in such a way as to mark it for her daily resting place, and to take off from the dusty, dusky sense of learning, which too often oppress us in such abodes when consecrated to the use of the other sex alone. At the further end it opened into a well-filled conservatory, where happy birds were singing, and from whence myrtle and heliotrope sent their soft perfume; and the bay windows in front looked out upon a garden in which the dark green turf was happily relieved by beds of snowdrops and crocuses, purple, white, and golden yellow, in alternate masses of rich colour, while a sense of calm seclusion was thrown over all, by the screen of shining evergreens that almost shut out this

fairy nook from the pleasure grounds beyond it. A couch and table already laid for breakfast were placed in the deep recess of one of the windows commanding this pretty view. The couch was occupied by an invalid, a boy of about ten years of age, with blue eyes and golden hair, that would have given him the aspect of an angel, but for a look of patient sorrow on his brow, such as angels do not need to wear, save, perhaps, when they are compelled to mourn over the erring mortals committed to their keeping. A pair of crutches laid beside him told the story of his sickly childhood, and more than accounted for that look of uncomplaining sadness which we have noticed, and which, touching as it would have been on the face of any, was doubly so on that of one so young and fair.

At that moment, however, his thoughts were happily diverted from his own sorrow by the appearance of some unwonted object in the garden, and upon this his eyes were so intently fixed that he did not even hear the lady's question, a mental absence equally shared in, though from a different cause, by the only other remaining

occupant of the chamber. This third individual was a man of about thirty years of age, with a face full of character and intellectual power, but whom we may not venture to describe more minutely, seeing that at this particular instant he lay almost buried out of sight, in an easy-chair, while the broad sheet of an unfolded 'Times' completed the process of shrouding him from observation.

"Frank! Wyllie!" cried Miss De Burghe, with a kind of half-affected, half-real annoyance at their inattention. "What is there in the 'Times,' what growing in the garden, to deprive you of eyes and ears for the benefit of your neighbour?"

"Political discontents in Paris," cried Frank.

"The little cress girl in the garden," murmured Wyllie almost in the same breath.

"The little cress girl first by all means," said Evelyn. "Paris and its news will keep, and Lizzy's appetite will not prove quite so accommodating, poor child, I am afraid—"

Miss de Burghe was rising from the table as she spoke, when the door opened, and a young

girl glided noiselessly as a shadow to her side. Scarce sixteen summers could have passed over her brow, and beautiful as a fairy, she was almost as diminutive. When first you looked upon her face, you did not judge its expression strictly; you forgot to weigh the bad against the good, or rather, perhaps, you never dreamed that anything of bad could be mingled in the composition of a thing so lovely. You gazed upon her as you would have gazed upon a rainbow, or a fire fly, or a humming bird, or any other bright fantastic thing in Heaven above, or the earth beneath it; and it was not until you remembered that this vision of a poet's dream was still a woman, a human, and therefore a responsible creature, with a soul to be saved, and a mind to recognise the greatness of her destinies, and a double nature out of which to work them, the higher ever warring against the lower, and the lower still seeking to encroach upon the higher; it was not until you remembered this, that while you looked into those bright unsettled eyes, and marked the passionate quivering of that rosy lip, you felt half inclined

to shudder at the tale they told—of headlong passions without principle to restrain them, of fierce and indomitable will without that calm wisdom of religion, which alone could have rendered it heroic in the ways of virtue.

But it was not upon the first nor even upon the second interview that you would have discovered all this. Strangers seldom left her unfascinated by her beauty, and by the thousand little winning ways, which her half childish, half womanish position permitted on the one hand and gave a charm to on the other; while to those who ought to have known her better—the dwellers by her own hearth and home—to them, as it so often happens in such cases, she seemed still a child, and was loved and petted as such without much reference to the good or bad that might still be lurking undeveloped in her disposition. Possibly of all that home-circle Evelyn was the one who knew her best. Women come so much in contact with each other, that she had already discovered that germ of selfishness which lay hidden beneath the surface; and, besides, she had from nature and education an un-

conquerable dread of that reckless liberty of thought and speech in which Lily indulged in her hours of enthusiasm.

Yet it was this very enthusiasm that attracted Frank to the worship of his little sister. He saw nothing of Lily but the glittering exterior. He knew her to be affectionate, innocent, impetuous, and lively; but he forgot that if she were innocent, she was still untried. He was proud of what he thought her genius, but he remembered not that genius, unruly by sense and principle, was little less than madness. He accepted of her eloquent harangues against social and religious bondage, as proofs of a mind strong enough to emancipate itself from what he considered the superstitions of the nursery; and he reflected not that such an idea of her own irresponsibility lodged in a human creature's breast must one day infallibly take root in evil—take root downwards, and shoot out upwards, until all the fairer promise of the harvest should be destroyed beneath its shadow. He forgot all this, or rather, indeed, he did not recognise it as a fact. He judged his sister, too, by himself; he

knew that he had ever aspired after truth for its own sake, and if, at last, he had ceased to seek it, it was because he fanciel (however falsely) that already he had attained it.

The truth, or rather that which he considered truth, had made him sad, but it could not make him vicious. He was gifted with a nobleness of nature which recoiled from vice of its own free prompting, and it never occurred to him that others with a weaker will to resist the evil might have a stronger craving towards it; least of all had he ever dreamed that his young sister, carefully secluded as she had been from all its outward forms, had yet its instincts in her; or that she had already listened to the tempter's voice; or that, as really was the case at the very moment when our tale commences, she was actually upon the edge of the precipice, and that in her final plunge she would seek to justify her conduct by a reference to his axioms.

How, indeed, could he think it, as she entered that morning with her bright looks and her smile, as if no heavier cares than those of childhood had ever yet come near her, while with the half

sister, half privileged little daughter kind of way that ever won him most especially to love her, she pushed aside the crumpled newspaper, and imprinted a light but loving kiss upon his forehead. From him she passed to Evelyn, and in answer to the half reproachful "You are late this morning, Lily," of the latter, answered impatiently :

"Because I have been with mama, and she wants a cup of tea—and I met my uncle on the stairs, and he says we must not wait for him—he was going to speak to Parker—"

"Is not my mother well this morning, Lily?" cried Frank, all his apathy or his interest in his newspaper forgotten in a moment.

"There is nothing much the matter with her, I think," said Lily; "Sunday exhausts her faculties; no great wonder either, as she performs it, and you know that Monday is almost always a bad day with her."

This was all true enough in the main, and Evelyn knew that Mrs. Montgomery's Sabbath was enough to exhaust the strength of an old woman and the patience of a young one, yet she

could not help feeling annoyed at the indifference with which Lily spoke of the good lady's indisposition; and so perhaps, though all unconfessed and unconsciously to himself, was Frank, for he rose at once from his beloved arm chair, and came to aid Evelyn in the arrangement of the little tray which was to bear her breakfast to his mother.

Lily on her part glided off towards the sofa where Wyllie lay waiting impatiently until some one should come to relieve his anxiety about the little cress girl, and no sooner had she learned the cause of his wistful glances than, throwing open the opposite window, she sprang into the garden at once.

"Never mind," said Frank, observing the expression of Evelyn's face as she watched the retreating figure of the young girl, "we cannot put old heads upon young shoulders, you know, and Lily is like a butterfly, always wanting to be in two places at once. Give me the tray, and I will carry it to my mother."

He took it as he spoke, looking (as indeed he felt) rather glad than otherwise that the office had

devolved upon him, for if his sister was a part of his life, his mother almost seemed to him as that very life itself, so passionately did he love her; his whole heart and soul were bound up in hers, and for her sake it was that he was living here in a state of inactivity little suitable to his intellectual attainments, having given up a fair though distant prospect of success in a liberal profession, for the sole purpose of tending her in her declining years, of watching over her to the end, and of finally receiving her last sigh upon his bosom.

She was the only sister of Mr. Sutherland the owner of ‘the Ferns,’ but her husband had died soon after the birth of Lily, leaving her in such distressed circumstances that Mr. Sutherland, since then, had taken her and her infant to reside with him, and Frank, too proud willingly to allow his mother to be put under such an obligation, did his best to lessen it in a pecuniary point of view, by throwing up his college life, and accepting the office of tutor to his uncle’s eldest boy.

Of this boy, we shall have much to say by-and-bye, but not just yet. Mr. Sutherland’s

only other child was the young invalid on the sofa, for Evelyn de Burghe was the daughter of the late Mrs. Sutherland by a former husband.

Frank had hardly left the room when Lily re-entered it from the garden, bringing a basket of water cresses with her, and closely followed by their owner, a miserable looking little girl with blue nose and fingers, and tattered dress, still wet and clinging from the moist places in which she had sought her merchandise.

"See, Wyllie, darling," cried Lily, with childish glee. "See how fresh and green these are. But we must wash them first," she added with a very perceptible glance of disgust at the child who had brought them. "We must wash them clean of all contamination, and then you can spread them with a clear conscience on your bread and butter."

Even as she was speaking, she plunged them into a china bowl, and while with her rosy fingers she endeavoured daintily to cleanse them from the earth which was clinging to the lower leaves, or from what she yet more intensely

dreaded, any previous contact with Lizzy's dirty fingers, Evelyn, on more hospitable thoughts intent, set a basin of bread and milk before the half-starved child.

It was February, but the air was mild as tho' it had been summer, and Evelyn lingered a moment at the open window to question the little girl about her mother, who had been ill the last time Lizzy brought cresses to the 'Ferns.' The question had hardly escaped her lips when Lizzy suddenly stopped eating, and there were real tears in her eyes as she answered sadly:—

" Troth, my lady, she's very bad entirely ! Father bate her last night a' most to smithereens."

" Poor thing," said Evelyn, " and what for, my child ? "

" Av you plaize, my lady, bekaise she wanted the bit of coppers she got fur the work she done to git us some vittles for supper—and father—" .

" Well and what did father want ? " asked Evelyn, observing that she paused.

"Ough! father wanted it for the public av coarse," replied Lizzy with a little hesitation perceptible in her manner; "but shure he'd bate the skin off of me if he knew that I towld on him. So av you plaize, my lady, it 'ud be best not to mintion it, in case he ever comes accross you."

"Mention it, my poor child, why should I? or how," she added as the thought passed thro' her mind that she neither knew the man in question by name or sight; all her knowledge of him and his, being derived from Lizzy, who had some how managed to install herself as "water cress gatherer especial" to the family at the 'Ferns.'

"But did your father get the money, Lizzy, after all?"

"Didn't he tho'," said the child. "Ah, thin why wouldn't he, my lady? Shure hadn't he the strong hand to take it, and mother, what wid work an' cryin, waker nor a little babby."

"And so you went supperless to bed?"

"Well, it warn't the first, and it won't be the last time neither! and that's why I'm on the

hill so airly, for I thought may be the kind hearted young gentleman would like the greens for his breakfast."

"How you must hate your father," said Lily, carelessly, as she passed and repassed the window while arranging Wyllie's little breakfast table to her fancy. "To starve his own children for the sake of an odious gin shop. What a brute!"

"Mother doesn't call him a brute," said Lizzy, gravely. "She says he is our father."

"And when he beats you, what does she call him then?" asked Lily.

"Then she cries, and says nothing at all at all," was Lizzy's answer.

"And when he takes her money, and goes to the ale-house?"

"She says it's the bad habit he's got, and that he can't help it; and troth it seems so, for he's never to say altogether right down sober; but we childhre do be wishing some times that he could, for it keeps our bellies empty—and does him a power of harrum besides."

"Poor little thing," said Wyllie, tenderly.

"Come here and say if this half-crown will not be enough to buy breakfast for the children?"

"Ah, thin may the Heavens be your bed this day for the kind heart and open hand to the poor and needy," cried the child holding up the money with triumphant gratitude in both look and gesture. "Buy breakfast, to be shure it will, lashins and lashins of breakfast, only I must contrive manes to hide it from father, for av he only catch sight of it, he'd drink it all up in a jiffy, an' so we'd be ruinationed entirely agin."

"But how will you hide it?" asked Wyllie, looking at the living little bundle of rags before him with a strong notion of the impossibility of discovering a single article among her garments sufficiently sound to admit of her stowing away her treasure within it.

Lizzy, however, thought otherwise, for taking off the apology for a straw hat that ornamented her head, she very cleverly inserted the money into the lining, by which alone the dilapidated plaits were kept together at all.

"See now," she cried in the tone of satisfied and successful genius. "He'll never drhame of

lookin' there for money, not but what he'll sarch me from head to foot, he will, but this time any ways I'll be cuter nor he, and av I hears him in the place afore I open the door, may I never sin but I'll jist rowl the bannet all up of a heap and hotch it into a corner, and then, when he comes to sarch for the testers, sorra ha'porth poor Lizzy will have got about her."

It would be impossible to convey any idea of the exulting zest with which Lizzy described the scene, the rolling up of the wretched bonnet, the clever movement by which it was to be hotched, as she called it, into the corner, the look of stolid unconsciousness with which afterwards she would pass to the paternal arms for personal examination, and the triumphant laugh that at once wound up this description of the scene, and conveyed the idea of its success; all was inimitable in its way, and when Wyllie and his thoughtless cousin laughed aloud, even Evelyn, albeit sighing heavily all the while, could not resist a smile.

"Poor child," she said aloud as Lizzy disappeared thro' the garden-gate, "what a fearful lot

is that of poverty! And if we dread temptation in the lap of plenty, what must it be, when starvation urges it upon us? Alas! alas! we complain of the want of truth and honesty in the pauper, and forgetting that it is this very poverty which has branded such vices on his soul, we don't always even deign to remind ourselves that hateful and dishonorable as such practices appear to us, they too often present themselves to his mind as the only possible means of escaping from starvation.

"But Lizzy is not dishonest, Evelyn," observed Wyllie, anxious for the honor of his favorite; "surely you do not think so?"

"Dishonest, Wyllie, oh, certainly not, only having once learned cleverly to deceive her father, it is impossible not to fear that she may lose at last all scruple of deceiving others if her necessities should ever prompt it."

"Horrid man! I hope she will deceive him all the days of his life," was Lily's fervent ejaculation, while Wyllie still urged his sister.

"But they would be starved without; surely, surely, you do not blame her."

"Blame her," said Evelyn, affectionately laying her hand on her brother's shoulder. "Blame her, Wyllie! when I am tempted like Lizzy and withstand temptation, then perhaps I may throw the first stone, but certainly not till then. In the mean time I only say, God help the poor."

"Amen, most noble lady," said Frank, who entered the room at that moment. "Why hallo, Lily," he cried, turning to his sister, "I declare while I have been doing your duties by my mother, you have been poaching on Evelyn's, and making Wyllie here as comfortable as a king."

"So you have indeed," said Evelyn; "dear Lily, I wish you were always in such an actively benevolent humour," she continued, glancing at the delicate slices of bread and butter, and the pretty little basket of freshly cut flowers from the conservatory which Lily had placed in pleasant proximity to the cream and sugar on Wyllie's little table.

"And so do I," said Wyllie, "you have made every thing look so pretty, Lily; you sometimes

work like a good little fairy when no one is looking, and then at other times you are—”

“Not in an actively benevolent humour,” said Lily, “I can’t do anything unless I happen to be in the proper mood for it, so it is no use trying.”

“In that case you can hardly expect much gratitude, since you will be acting only to please yourself and not your friends,” said Evelyn, “but, Frank, you have not told us yet how your mother is to-day.”

“Oh, pretty well, I think,” said Frank, “we had a little chat together, and then she sent me down to get my breakfast. So please give it to me, Evelyn, and as quick as you can, too, for half the morning is gone already.”

The tea accordingly was poured out and the toast buttered and then Frank spoke again.

“But after all—by Jove, I had almost forgotten to ask—what was that pious ejaculation, Evelyn, which you were pouring forth as I came into the room just now?”

“Evelyn was invoking the aid of Heaven upon the poor,” said Lily, who albeit she had

chosen to eat her breakfast this morning at Wyllie's little table, still kept a sharp ear for all that was going on at the other end of the room.

"A little of man's aid would be the more substantial benefit, I should have thought," said Frank, "if our most wise Minerva had not affirmed the contrary."

"I have neither denied nor affirmed!" said Evelyn, "in fact, it seems very desirable to me that the two should go hand in hand, or, to speak more correctly, that the first should prompt and direct the latter."

"Always supposing that we admit the first," said Frank, as he sipped his tea.

"Nay, Frank, I am not going to dispute that question with you," she answered smiling; "this is a bright, inspiriting morning, and I do not want your doctrines of future annihilation to mar the prospect."

"Truth is truth," said Frank, "and it is to be faced, not feared."

"It must be found first," said Evelyn coolly, "before we can do either the one or the other."

"Besides, Frank does not mean annihilation in the coarse vulgar sense in which you would use it, Evelyn," cried Lily, flying from her unfinished breakfast at Wyllie's table to seat herself beside her brother.

"In what sense then would you explain his words?" said Evelyn, for Frank was leaning his head upon his hand and seemed unwilling to reply; "and what can the denial of a future state be considered to mean, excepting annihilation?"

"It is not annihilation that I picture to myself in the death-sleep of our human nature!" cried Lily enthusiastically. "Then shall everything that is bright and ethereal in our present existence be absorbed into the spirit of that all gentle nature from whence we have derived our being; we shall crown ourselves with the stars, we shall revel in the sunbeams, we shall sing to the music of bright waters flowing, and we shall kiss the rose leaves in every summer breeze that sighs along the valley."

"And this," said Evelyn, laying her hand on the white arm of Lily, as she waved it gently

to and fro to the cadence of her voice, "what is to become of this?"

"That," said Frank, suddenly lifting up his head, "why of course from that 'fair and unpolluted flesh shall violets spring.' "

"Well, I am glad we have get down to earth at last," said Evelyn; "that solution of a portion of the difficulty at least I understand, but Lily's starlit aspirations are quite beyond my comprehension, as I suspect they are beyond your own," she added, with a quick glance at Frank as he rose from table.

"Let the poor child dream out her dream," he replied in a low voice, speaking rather to Evelyn's look than to her words. "It is a very pretty dream, and can do no harm."

"No harm," repeated Evelyn, "to spend her life in blowing mental soap bubbles, careless, so that the tints be pretty, of the fact that in the end they infallibly must burst; you believe in a sterner order of things yourself, and yet you suffer her to dissipate her mind in these vague dreams of beauty."

"It is because the order of things, in which I

believe, is so stern," said Frank sadly, "that I dare not as yet bring her into contact with it. She will come to it by degrees; she has passed the first bounds of the bigot circle; she is free from the chain in which you are still held captive, and she will learn the truth by the time that she has mental nerve and self reliance to endure it."

"And to what purpose?" asked Evelyn. "It will not make her happier—it cannot make her better."

"To what purpose!" said Frank, with a sort of brisk cheerfulness, which he always assumed when speaking on this subject. "Because it is fitting that the truth should be known; because it is fitting that we should recognise our destinies, and by learning the futility of aspiring beyond them should be strengthened to direct our best energies to the only thing that can avail us aught, their due and entire fulfilment here."

"And that fulfilment, but the success of some short forty, fifty, seventy years of time. How poor an end for so great an effort!"

"You are mistaken and unjust," Frank

warmly retorted. "The end is not with us; our progress is the progress of our race as well. For every step we make, our children will make two, and so on in proportion, till—"

"Till the human race has reached perfection," added Evelyn. "Yet, considering the world is some thousands of years of age already, so far we have gone but slowly about it."

"Aye, because hitherto we have made more retrograde than forward movements," cried Frank eagerly. "But now principles are beginning to be recognised, springs of action to be set in motion which must infallibly in a short time produce a different result. Why do you look so incredulous?"

"Because your hopes seem to me so simply impossible, so absolutely contradicted by all that history and our own experience of human nature tells us. You insist upon the necessity of man's perfection, and yet you give him no motive for endeavouring to attain it."

"I give him the highest and the best," said Frank, "the approbation of his own intellect, and the pleasure of doing right for right's sake,

which is after all an original instinct in the human heart."

" But other instincts are in that heart as well, other and more tangible pleasures will appeal to its earthly nature, and if there is no one above to forbid, nothing beyond to allure by hope or to restrain by fear, do you think there is not sufficient sophistry in the human breast to make the wrong seem right, or if not right, at least a matter of absolute indifference. But why do I talk thus of right and wrong?" Evelyn continued warmly. " There is no real right or wrong in such a system as you uphold. If there is no Supreme Being to give the law, there can of necessity be no law to break. If man is his own master, sovereign and uncontrolled, surely he has a right to legislate for himself, and to gratify his basest passions without any reference to the opinion of the world."

" He would be all the more noble in his rectitude—" Frank was just beginning, when his uncle entered.

Mr. Sutherland was a handsome, fair haired man, with a clear, cold, cut-stone sort of expres-

sion of countenance. He looked like one who could neither be moved by pity nor restrained by fear, and in any of the smaller embarrassments of life you would probably (had you known him intimately) as soon have thought of appealing to the sympathies of a statue as to anything of the kind that might be concealed within his bosom. On the present occasion he looked, if possible, more icy and reserved than usual, a certain symptom that something or other had gone wrong with him. Frank, whom he loved better than any human creature except his eldest son, was the only person whom he greeted with even a show of cordiality. Wyllie, who was chatting to his cousin Lily, he passed entirely without notice; but he bowed coldly to Evelyn as she proffered him the cup of tea which she had poured out upon his entrance. They did not love each other, that was plain. He respected her, it is true; he could not help it; but that very respect was inimical to affection, for it arose from an innate consciousness that she would never hesitate to thwart his dearest plans, if she conscientiously thought it right

to do so. This conviction induced a kind of fear, which in such a mind as his was tantamount to hatred. True, he almost hated himself also for the fear he could not subdue, but he hated her still more for being able to inspire it. Nevertheless, he was perfect master of himself and his own emotions, and therefore always treated her with the outward courtesy due to her position in the family as the daughter of his late wife, while she on her part possessed a native tact, which had hitherto effectually prevented any unpleasant collision between them.

"Any commands for Paris, Lily?" Mr. Sutherland at length broke the silence by demanding, while he pushed his cup over to Evelyn to be replenished, "I am off in an hour."

"To Paris, sir!" cried each of the party, in various tones of astonishment and enquiry.

"To Paris," he repeated coldly, "I will bring you anything you like, Lily, from a doll to a lace tucker, only do not waste time in deciding which."

After Frank, Lily was decidedly her uncle's

favourite. She was both pretty and playful, and there was neither danger of her fathoming any of his plans, nor as his instinct told him, of thwarting them if she did. Mr. Sutherland had other reasons also for liking Lily, and so he did love and indulge her, to the utter exclusion of poor Wyllie, his youngest son, and the only one at that time residing at the Ferns. For Wyllie was not only the *élève* of Evelyn, and therefore the reflection of all her opinions; poor Wyllie was a cripple also, and what share could a cripple hope to have in the heart of the proud ambitious man, whose whole life had been devoted to the one object of lifting up an ancient but impoverished name to the place it had once held among the magnates of the land.

“ Surely, sir,” cried Frank, “ you will not think of risking a journey to Paris in such times as these.”

“ And why not,” responded his uncle coldly, “ are the times out of joint that you speak so doubtfully about them?”

“ Paris is out of joint at any rate; see here, sir, what the *Times*’ correspondent says, there is

no saying the moment at which another revolution may be expected."

"Then I certainly shall not wait till it comes," replied Mr. Sutherland, rising from his hurried and hardly tasted meal. "Had the *Times* in its omniscient wisdom told us the precise day and hour in which it was to come, why one might have waited perhaps; but as it is I cannot hesitate over chances, I must be there at once."

"I wish you would let me go instead, sir; there is less danger for a young man."

"I cannot, Frank, I have received letters which make my personal presence urgent."

"One word, sir," cried Evelyn, unable to bear the suspense and anxiety of her own fancies any longer, "is it about Frederick?"

"No," said Mr. Sunderland, in a tone of ice, "It is not about Frederick. I shall be off in an hour, Frank, but I will see you before I go."

And having said thus much he disappeared from the room as suddenly as he had entered it, leaving the little party in much perplexity as to the real motive of his journey.

"Can it be Frederick?" asked Evelyn appeal-

ing with anxious eyes to Frank, as soon as Mr. Sutherland's retreating footsteps were no longer audible in the passage.

"No, I am sure it is not," he replied in a way both kind and encouraging. "I am sure it is not; do not worry yourself, dear Evelyn, if it had been bad news about Fred he would have told it to me at once."

"Certainly," chimed in Lily. "Do not look so sad, Evy. No doubt uncle would have told it all to Franzie."

Evelyn looked at her, and something like a feeling of surprise passed across her mind at the absolute indifference with which Lily spoke of Frederick, to whom, when he was the heir and well beloved son of the house, she had ever shown the most devoted attachment. It was not a subject, however, to be enquired into, so she only asked of Frank whether he could give a guess as to the motives of his uncle's journey.

"I hardly like to say what I think," said Frank, hesitating a little, "lest I should be mistaken; but it struck me just now that it might

be in some way connected with the affairs of M. de St. Arnoul."

"What, of my poor uncle?" said Evelyn. "It is very likely, as many of his relations are living there. I wonder why Mr. Sutherland has been so mysterious about everything connected with the death of this good old man?"

"There is some mystery I know," said Frank, "some wretched woman or other who is laying claim to the fortune. Was it not left entirely to Frederick?"

"With the exception of £20,000, to be divided between Wyllie and me. Mr. Sutherland spoke to me about it the other day. He wishes to keep my share in his own hands for the present, and to pay me interest upon it. I have agreed, of course, for it is quite as safe with him, and I should not know what to do with it if I had it myself.

"Safe with my uncle!" repeated Frank, "why of course it is; what ever may be his other faults, he is the very soul of honor, and money in his hands is quite as safe as it would be if it were lodged in the Bank of England."

CHAPTER II.

IT was the day upon which Louis Philippe lost his crown, and fled from a people that his own narrow policy, and grasping low ambition had aroused to frenzy. He could not lay the storm that he had raised, he would not face the danger he had invoked—he had neither mental greatness, to yield gracefully his own designs, nor mental energy to enforce them, and so he gathered himself up and fled, leaving all behind him in anarchy and confusion. Any account of the revolution that ensued does not lie within the intention of these pages, therefore it will be

sufficient to say that blood had already flowed. Rather by accident than design the troops had fired upon the insurgents; and some having been wounded and some killed, the latter, with the corpse of a woman displayed ostentatiously among them, had been paraded by the light of torches, and amid the hoarse cry of popular indignation, and the irregular sounding of the tocsin, on immense biers provided for the occasion, through, the most crowded thoroughfares of the city. A heavy column of armed men marched on either side of these lugubrious funeral cars, and as the procession pressed onwards towards the quartier Saint Martin, small parties of soldiers detached themselves from the principal body, and diving into the obscurest and most central parts of Paris, went from house to house calling the inhabitants forth to vengeance.

Hardly, however, was such an incentive needed to the fury of the people. Everywhere as the procession passed, men accepted of the token of death as a proof of irreconcilable enmity between the government and the nation; the thoroughfares were emptied as if by magic, but

it was only to give place to a countless host of artizans, who working silently, ceaselessly, and steadily at their fearful task, succeeded so rapidly in unpaving streets, erecting barricades, and preparing the city for a state of siege, that when morning at last dawned upon their labours, Paris was roused by the sound of a brisk fusillade to all the terrors, present and to come, of an armed revolution.

Concessions, which had they been given but the day before might have retarded, if they could not have prevented the fall of the monarchy, were now too late. Proclamations hastily put forth, loosely and unsatisfactorily worded, and unsigned by anything like competent authority, only betrayed the weakness of the Government which they could not save. They showed but as a snare, and a deceit in the eyes of the people, and were either torn down with indignation or received with contempt; those who read them merely turning aside to arm themselves yet more entirely for the struggle which had at last become inevitable, as it ever will, when the demands of a nation, whether just or the contrary, are

met by craft and duplicity on the part of its rulers. In the midst of all these threatening sights and sounds, Mr. Sutherland pursued his way, calm and unmoved, as if the hoarse cries around him were not as the one voice of a people, terrible in its hour of vengeance, or as if the dropping fire of musketry, here and there sounding in the distance, was not the commencement of a struggle bearing fearful resemblance in its present phase to that which, within his own time and memory had deluged the land with blood. He had entered the Rue de Lille at the time when our story overtakes him, and pausing now and then to examine the numbers of the houses, stopped at last before a handsome looking mansion at that end of the street which approaches the chamber of deputies, and enquired at the porter's lodge if a Madame de St. Arnoul was not residing "au seconde." The answer being in the affirmative, he walked up stairs, and desiring the female servant who replied to his summons to announce him as Mr. Sutherland, entered the apartment without awaiting an invitation.

A lady, whose dark soft eyes and languishing appearance announced her as a Creole, was reclining gracefully on a sofa, while a young child, blue eyed and golden haired, and so far bearing but little resemblance to her mother, half knelt and half sat upon a low stool beside her. At the mention of his name Madame de St. Arnoul grew deadly pale, and half rose to greet him, but finding he made no movement to respond to her advances, she sank back upon her couch again with a graceful air of nonchalance, partly the effect of wounded pride and partly of her natural manner, and merely motioning him to a *fauteuil* beside her, waited in silence the explanation of his visit. It might be that Mr. Sutherland felt a little taken aback by her indifference, but if he were, it was neither his habit nor nature to betray it; and leaning slightly on the back of the chair she had proffered to his acceptance, he fixed his cold grey eyes upon her, while, with a look of most insulting suspicion, he observed in French :

“ Am I to understand, Madame, that you are the person (affecting to be the widow of the late

M. de St. Arnoul) who addressed to me a letter which I received some days since in London."

There was no mistaking the tone, half of ironical enquiry, half of positive disbelief, in which these words were uttered. Foreigner as she was, and strange and impossible as such an insinuation must at first have appeared to her, Madame de St. Arnoul seized upon it at once, and answered with indignant emphasis :

"I am the widow of M. de St. Arnoul, and consequently the lady who, at his desire, and by his advice, addressed to you, his brother-in-law, (and, as he thought, fast friend), the letter to which you allude. You perceive, sir, I am assuming you to be really *that* Mr. Sutherland whom my dear husband has so often named to me with such brotherly and affectionate remembrance."

She paused a moment, but as soon as Mr. Sutherland had by a slight movement of the head asserted his identity with the person mentioned, Madame de St. Arnoul rose, and with the nice tact of a woman, leading forward her little girl, presented her to him, saying :

"Rosalie, this is the gentleman of whom poor papa has so often told us, the gentleman whom he taught you to call your uncle, and who would, he said he was sure, supply his place in your regard by more than fatherly love and kindness. Kiss his hand, my child, and tell him you are prepared to give him all the respect and tenderness due to one whom your father appointed as your guardian, and whom he taught you to regard with the obedience of a daughter."

Poor Madame de St. Arnoul had intended to say "love," but the word failed her. She could not even in the easy treachery of lip language couple the idea of love with the hard, handsome looking individual whose very attitude said, as he meant it should say, all that the pharisee of old might in such circumstances have uttered, of doubt in her virtue and confidence in his own.

"Father," he muttered, "and daughter. Humph! of course. I can have no doubt whatever of that fact. But, madame, you are aware, I suppose, that to be the daughter of her father does not necessarily constitute this young lady heiress either of his name or fortune."

Without vouchsafing any direct reply to this savage speech, Madame de St. Arnoul led her daughter to the door, saying:

“Your *bonne* will be waiting for you, Rosy. Good bye, and God bless you, darling.”

With a heavy sense of evil impending over her, she then kissed the brow of her fair child, closed the door behind her, and quietly returned to her sofa. Mr. Sutherland meanwhile was impatiently pacing the room, and after waiting in vain for him to speak again, she resumed the conversation with such a calm dignity of innocence in her manner, that, unconsciously, he paused in his uneasy walk to listen.

“My husband, sir, assured me that even if he had not made a will, Rosalie, as his only child, was the legal and natural heiress of all his fortune.”

“Natural enough, no doubt of that,” interposed her listener.

“Happily, however,” she went on, either not understanding, or not deigning to notice the covert insinuation conveyed by these words, which were uttered in English, “happily he did not trust to that fact alone. But I need

not trouble myself to tell you this," she added, suddenly interrupting herself, "since you must be already in possession of the letter which contained the expression of his dying wishes, and which I enclosed with my own when I announced my arrival with my child in Paris."

"A letter, madame, I certainly received, but you must excuse me if I venture to doubt its authenticity—if I venture seriously to doubt it," he repeated, as though he really were considering the matter with every intention to do justice to all parties. "It is his seal certainly—but his hand—pooh! pooh! Madame, unless you guided his pen by force, the hand of my poor Edward never had touched that paper."

"I know well," said the young widow tearfully, "that his poor hand shook fearfully, for he was so reduced by his illness that the only marvel was that he could write at all. Nothing, in fact, but the most intense affection for his wife and child could have given him strength to do so."

"The writing is not that of M. de St. Arnoul, and even if it were, it would go for nothing, since

a man at his age, and in the agonies of death as he was, could be made to say anything they chose by those about him."

"I did not even see the letter until after he had expired," murmured the wife with an hysterical sob, which she could not entirely repress at this direct mention of his death.

"And if, as that letter stated, he had been married for so many years," pursued Mr. Sutherland, "how was it that he never said so, or that in all his former letters, and I have received and luckily preserved a good many of them, he never once, directly or indirectly, alluded to the fact?"

Madame de St. Arnoul grew scarlet first, but instantly afterwards became deadly pale.

"He feared to offend you," she answered, after a little instant of hesitation, and then all her hot eastern blood boiling over at the civil sceptism of the smile which met this rejoinder, she walked across the room with the air of a queen, opened an escritoire at the further end, and extracted from it a morsel of paper, which she put in his hand, saying,—“Is not this a sufficient proof of

our marriage, even tho', as I acknowledge, my poor Edward did shrink in the very weakness of his brotherly affection from inflicting until the last moment the knowledge of the disappointment on you?"

"Pah!" he replied contemptuously, "a mere piece of waste paper, and good for nothing but the lighting of a cigar," and suiting the action to the word, he deliberately laid it among the burning embers in the grate.

Madame de St. Arnoul sprang forward to the rescue, but he held her back with his strong arm, and not until the document was reduced to ashes did he release his captive, nor even then until he had stamped his foot upon the fragments so as to make himself certain they were entirely destroyed.

The unhappy woman sank back in speechless sorrow on her chair, but as the consequences to her child of this cruel deed rushed yet more fully upon her mind, she wrung her hands, exclaiming,—

"Rosalie, my child, my child, I have ruined thee! But oh! my God, who ever could have

thought that one whom poor Edward loved so well, would have proved himself such a villain?"

"Who, indeed?" retorted Mr. Sutherland with a diabolical sneer.

"But they shall know it yet," cried his victim, roused to frenzy by his taunting manner. "To the whole world will I proclaim it, that the man who writes himself a prince among the merchants, could yet stoop to the meanness of destroying a legal document for the sake of defrauding a poor babe, the child of his friend and brother, of the name and fortune that her father left her."

At the word legal document Mr. Sutherland looked sharply at his victim, and for an instant it occurred to him that if she were at all a woman of sense and spirit, the burning of her marriage certificate might prove a rash experiment, even to win the enormous fortune, which was the stake he played for. But he was seldom mistaken in a countenance, and another glance at hers assured him that he had been right in his estimate of her character, and that with all her eastern pride and impetuosity, Madame de

St. Arnoul was not only as innocent as a child of all practical knowledge of the world, but even more incapable than many children of acquiring it by experience. Acting on this knowledge, therefore, he replied with an assumption of indifference infinitely greater than any amount of security he was really feeling at the moment.

“ And what if no one will believe you, Madame? What if I choose to deny whatever you may choose to assert upon the subject? If you say I destroyed this paper, and I declare I did not, which, think you, will the English worshippers of wealth and station prefer to believe, the ‘Prince among their merchants,’ or the poor and friendless adventuress whom chance or poverty has carried to their shores.”

Bitterly did it now come home to Madame de St. Arnoul’s understanding, that in all probability her enemy judged correctly, and feeling just as indeed he had intended that she should feel, helpless as an infant in his hands, she yielded to her impetuous, tropical nature, and burst into tears.

For a while he suffered her to weep in silence,

but as soon as he fancied her thoroughly exhausted by her passion, he once more ventured to approach for the purpose of whispering such overtures in her ear, as he hoped in her state of terror and depression, she would joyfully accept of.

For once, however, he had over calculated his power; Madame de St. Arnoul's pride was stronger than her prudence even yet, and her dark cheek glowed again, and her dark eyes gleamed with passion as she answered :

“ Wed my Rose to one of your sons! purchase the rights of my child with my child herself! No, sir, never! And upon which of your hopeful progeny,” she went on in tones of bitter irony, regardless, in her passion of the pale cheek and flashing eye of the insulted father, “ upon which of your hopeful progeny, may I ask, would you have me bestow my only treasure—my flower among the flowers—my precious Rosa? Is it upon the young scamp who I hear has left his father’s house to revel among gamblers, or the pale unhappy boy, the victim, it is said of a disease that may cripple him for life—upon which,

sir, which? Answer, that I may know the worst at once."

"Upon which you please, proud Jezabel! I thought to do you a service, but it must be as you like, of course. Yet let me tell you," added Mr. Sutherland proudly, "that Frederick Sutherland, with the thousands he will inherit from his father, and the name which he takes from a hundred ancestors would have been no contemptible match for your daughter, even if she had (which she has not), any right to the name and fortune you are trying to usurp."

"That may be your opinion, sir, but," said Madame de St. Arnoul, "you must permit me to keep my own. My child shall have all or nothing. I will make no base compromise between her honour and her interests. She shall have her father's name with her father's fortune, or she shall declare to the whole world the villany of which she has been made a victim. I know," she continued, as she saw his eye glancing with a look of covert triumph towards the expiring embers in the grate, "I am quite aware that you have destroyed one document, but that is not all,

the marriage certificate indeed is gone, yet happily the will remains."

If Mr. Sutherland could have been betrayed into the weakness of showing his emotions, he certainly would have yielded to it then. But now, as ever, he was master of his own feelings, and neither in look nor manner did he betray the disagreeable surprise he actually was feeling, as he repeated, less apparently for the information he really intended to obtain by the question, than for the satisfaction of expressing his contemptuous incredulity;

"The will—aye, indeed, the will—and so you look to the will to right you, do you?"

"I do, sir," she replied, and then went on with a very injudicious overflow of confidence. "That at least can hardly be disputed, for it was most carefully drawn up. And he thought of you even then, ungrateful as you are, he thought of you on his death bed, and not only bequeathed a handsome portion to each of your children, but (so fearful was he of distressing you by disturbing any of your financial arrangements) he prepared an especial clause by which until Rosalie

was actually in England you were not to be called upon to give any account of the sums which had been committed to your keeping."

A wild gleam of pleasure in Mr. Sutherland's eyes which not even his strong will could for a moment entirely repress, caused Madame de St. Arnoul again to feel that she had committed some imprudence, which might possibly have a fatal effect upon the fortunes of her child.

Helplessly she paused, and for one short second the wild idea of appealing to his mercy crossed her mind, but the imploring glance she cast upon him, was met by a look so expressive of satanic will and power, that her very soul seemed to wither away beneath it, and a shadow as of death itself, fell upon her cheek and brow as he replied :

" I have heard you to the end, Madame, and therefore it is only fair that I should now expect the same courtesy at your hands. You have," he continued coldly, " rejected the sole mode of settling our several pretensions to the fortune of M. de St. Arnoul, which the interests of my own family would permit me to offer, and not content

with rejection only, you have pointed your refusal with all the small malice that your woman's wit suggested. So far so good, you have done as you thought proper, but having done so you must also understand that every chance of compromise is over now and for ever. For mark me well, I have possession, and possession is power, and I will use that power to the utmost. I will use it as the kite does to pounce upon the sparrow; as the butcher to immolate the lamb; as the midnight murderer to assassinate his victim; I will use it without mercy to sweep away your fortune and your child's—to rob you of the sympathy of the good—to wrap you in the same obloquy with the bad, and by branding you as an evil woman and adventuress, to pay you back in the shame of your own child, for every sarcasm you have uttered against mine."

A shriek burst from Madame de St. Arnoul's lips, and she wrung her hands in agony.

"Rosalie," she cried, "my innocent Rosalie ! Oh, sir, you could not, you would not be so cruel."

"And wherefore not?" he answered coldly;

“or why should you complain, since it is your own words that have aroused the demon in me. You knew not what you were doing, perhaps, but having done it, rest assured your challenge has been accepted, and that from this hour until that of death, war to the knife is the word between us.”

Madame de St. Arnoul would again have spoken but as she opened her lips to do so, the stir and tumult of the *émeute*, which hitherto had only reached them like the hoarse murmur of a distant sea, seemed suddenly to burst into all the living energy of a great people’s wrath, and up from the street below the voices of ten thousand men came in one prolonged, discordant shout upon their ears; the rushing of twice ten thousand feet seemed to fill the city, the street, the very room they sat in, with a volume of harsh sound, which would have been awful in its depth, and breadth, and fullness, even if it had conveyed no prophetic warning to the ear, but which at such a moment as the present was yet more awful in its deep significance as the movement of a betrayed and indignant nation. Every now

and then cries of “*A bas la régence*,” “*Vive la république*,” “*A la poste les corrompues*,” told not only that the monarchy had ceased to be, but that its feeble and inefficient substitute, the regency, having been rejected also, Paris, and all France with Paris, was trembling on the verge of a revolution as bloody, perhaps, and fearful, as that which half a century before had made the inheritance of St. Louis a reproach among the nations.

Madame de St. Arnoul forgot her brother-in-law and her resentment, to clasp her little girl, who came running terrified into the room, to her bosom, and Mr. Sutherland himself had just walked to the window to watch the progress of the increasing outbreak, when the wife of the concierge rushed up-stairs, exclaiming :

“ Madame, madame, for the love of the ‘*Bon Dieu*’ save yourself. The *sans culottes* are in the house, and they will rob and murder every aristocrat they can discover. Fly, I beseech you, or at least cry out, “*A bas la régence!* *A bas Guizot!*” If you don’t want to be shot, cry out, ‘*A bas Guizot!*’ *Mon Dieu*, they are

coming! they are on the stairs! ‘*A bas Guizot!*
A bas Guizot!’”

And still shouting every gathering cry of the popular party that her fear would permit her to remember, the terrified creature again rushed away, vanishing as suddenly as she had appeared.

An awful pause ensued, but as the clamour below stairs increased, Madame de St. Arnoul clasped Rosalie yet more closely to her bosom, while her eyes unconsciously sought those of Mr. Sutherland. A strange light, uncertain, but very strange, was glittering in his cold blue eye, and then, as if only in answer to her appealing glances, he hastily exclaimed:

“This place is no longer safe! The mob are in the house, and they will soon be joined by hundreds who are coming from the chamber of deputies, and must pass this way. You should depart at once, madame; another moment, and it will be too late.”

For only answer to his recommendation, Madame de St. Arnoul pressed her lips to the forehead of her child, and the look she cast upon him seemed to say:

"We are alone—a woman and a child—how can we venture?"

"At such a moment," he continued, still replying to those speaking glances, and with the air of one who had no time to give consideration to the subject, "at such a crisis as the present, every private enmity should be forgotten. Whatever else you may be, you are a woman, and as a man it is my duty to protect you. It is for you to say if you can trust yourself with me."

The words seemed frank and fair, and so too, now that the first strange look had passed away was the expression of his cut stone features, nevertheless Madame de St. Arnoul might have hesitated a little longer, if unfortunately the crowd of men without, had not conquered all fear of the one more real foe within, and when he drew her arm in his, and took Rosalie on the other side, saying, "She will be safer with me," she did not venture to make any opposition, but suffered him to lead her in silence from the chamber.

Half a dozen ruffians, looking all the more ghastly for the black powder stains and smears

of blood, which betrayed the share they had taken in the recent struggle, met them on the landing place with shouts of:

“*Nous voulons Guizot! à l'enfer Guizot!*
We will have his head, if we go to the devil to fetch it!”

“*Allons, mes enfants!*” said Mr. Sutherland, shoving his way among them, “of course you will go there in good time, but there is no need to hurry. Chances are that Guizot is half way out of Paris already, and you will miss him altogether if you stay here longer. To the gates, and watch for him there. France expects this duty from you. *Vive la republique!* and *à bas Guizot! à bas la régence!* *à bas* every base son of France who does not hate tyrants and love the people!”

A loud shout greeted this exposition of his political opinions, and taking advantage of the moment, Mr. Sutherland cleared the crowd, gained the porter’s lodge in safety, and without further opposition led his companions into the street beyond.

Once there, Madame de St. Arnoul discovered,

as from his momentary glance through the window her companion had probably found out long before, that the tumult which had caused their sudden panic, was not nearly so close as they had imagined, but was coming up from the direction of the Chamber of Deputies, where the chief struggle of the day had been carried on.

Crowds indeed were passing through the Rue de Lille, but they were in scattered groups rather than in masses, and were hurrying on to swell the tide setting in towards the *Hotel de Ville*, whither the infuriated rabble were at that moment conducting the self devoted men, who for the next three nights and days, were to oppose themselves with no other weapons than such as their eloquence and good cause could give them, to schemes of anarchy and vengeance, which if they had been put into execution, would have plunged Paris into mourning and overwhelmed her with disgrace.

Why did Mr. Sutherland follow this rabble rout instead of endeavouring to recede from it? Madame de St. Arnoul, could not refrain from

asking herself the question even in the midst of the haste and confusion, which took away her breath and almost deprived her of the possession of her senses.

“Surely,” she at last ventured to remonstrate, as they turned into the “Rue du Bac,” “surely we are approaching too near that terrible crowd; would it not be safer to go back?”

But Mr. Sutherland either did not or would not hear the question, and with his powerful grasp upon her arm, and his strong fixed will still urging on her footsteps, he made her feel herself so absolutely in his power, that she suffered him to hurry her forward without further opposition, until they reached the “Quai Voltaire,” where they fell in with the very crowd which it seemed as if it should have been their express object to avoid.

It was as if they had plunged into the very vortex of a whirlpool. The living tide of excited, angry human beings, with which they had so rashly mingled, came pouring down upon them mass after mass, wave over wave, not rolling past and leaving them where they were, but

bearing them along with it, upwards and onwards in spite of themselves, lifting them from off their very feet, depriving them it almost seemed of all power of volition, forcing them, whether they would or not, onwards and onwards still; now well nigh stifled and upset by a backward movement or sudden stoppage of the crowd in front, now pushed violently forward by the pressure of that which was following in the rear, but compelled in either case, resistlessly as a straw floating upon the waters, to yield obedience to the impulse.

Onwards they were borne, through "the Quais Voltaire, Malaquais, Monnais," across the "Pont Neuf," to the "Quai Megisserie," the "Place de la Grève," over a path rough with broken weapons or slippery with blood, or horrible, here and there with prostrate figures, telling by their terrible immobility of eye and limb, of the fate that had come so suddenly upon them.. And still as they went, wild forms were rushing at their side, and naked brawny arms were waving over them, and pike and cutlass were flashing within an inch of their dazzled eyes, and pale

faces, with close set teeth and eyes, glaring in all the frenzy of anger or enthusiasm, were closing continually around them, while the names of the favorite leaders of the day, of Dupont, Lamartine, de l'Eure, d'Arago, mingled with denunciations against the recent monarchy and its upholders, filled the air, and floated like a canopy of harsh sounds above them.

Madame de St. Arnoul felt as if her senses had already left her, and closing her eyes like one in the agony of drowning, she suffered herself to be carried resistlessly along wherever the crowd conducted her; nor was she even conscious, so completely was she bewildered, that Mr. Sutherland had dropt her arm, until either by an intentional push on his part, or by the mere fact of being left to her own unassisted efforts, she was flung hopelessly on the ground. Another instant and she would have been trampled beyond all chance of recognition under foot, but a woman in the garb of a Sister of Charity darted into the very midst of the crowd, seized her as if she had been an infant, and as much by energy of will as by mere strength of body, carried her

clear off to the court-yard of a house hard by, and closed the gates behind her.

Long before this rescue came, however, the crowd had hurried Mr. Sutherland out of sight, and not for a moment did it occur to him that anything less than a miracle could have saved her.

“Dead for a ducat!” he exclaimed, and catching Rosalie in his arms, he stood for a second literally stemming in the strength of his fancied triumph the mighty masses that poured down upon him, then yielding wilfully to the pressure, he suffered himself and the child to be borne along, he knew not whither, and he cared as little.

CHAPTER III.

THE night wind swept darkly and coldly across an open heath not far from London, now coming up in gusts which took away the breath, and shook every tree and shrub it touched, as if with a sudden terror, now wailing low among the heather and the furze, as if a spirit of sadness floated on its wings; whilst both the sharp sudden gust, and the long creature-like moaning of the storm, found fearful responses in the bosom of one at least of the two travellers who were at that moment abroad upon the common. The elder of these two was a tall, strong man, with a

face more fearful in its calm intensity of purpose, than the most turbulent expression of passion could have made it. He held by the hand a child, shivering and shrinking like a sensitive plant from the touch of the cold wind, but yet more perhaps from terror of the stern, silent man at whose side she was compelled to walk.

The moon was nearly at the full, but it had little power on such a night as the one which we are describing. Now and then indeed it came fitfully into view, but only to be blotted out again by a mass of heavy clouds which the storm king hurled before it, and the pale passing gleam seemed then to have served no other purpose than to increase by contrast the previous darkness of the road, and the ghastly loneliness of the surrounding scene. So thought the elder traveller as he looked around, but the child saw nothing. She listened indeed to the wind as it went moaning past her, until every tale of supernatural horror that she had ever known came back upon her imagination, and made her shudder as if a thousand spirits were riding on the blast; but still she saw nothing, and nothing in

fact was it intended she should see; for not only had a handkerchief been tied tightly across her eyes, but a thick veil had been also wrapt around her bonnet, and thus, while to a passing traveller she might have seemed but as one guarded by more than ordinary care, against the visiting of the night wind, she was in reality, and she knew it well, neither more nor less than a captive led blindfold to her doom.

What that doom might prove to be, she, poor child, in her wildest imaginings never could have guessed. Death was the utmost that she dreamed of. And she knew not nor could she dream that death would have been a mercy and a grace compared to the lot that was intended her in life.

The man who conducted her continued in the mean time to move steadily on towards a light which he at least could see, tho' she could not, gleaming faintly in the distance. It might have been a Will-o'-the-Wisp for all the show it made on that dark common, but he knew well it was a signal light set to guide his footsteps, and without troubling himself to seek the path,

if path there was, he dragged his unhappy little prisoner right on in the direction of this beacon, through muddy slough, and briar, and brushwood, with the most reckless indifference as to all that she might be suffering from the difficulties of the way. He arrived at length within a couple of yards of the cottage from whence the light was gleaming, and there he halted. It was a long low building, half inn, half farm house, set in a solitary nook, far apart from any of the roads or paths by which the other parts of the common were intersected, and still more effectually concealed from public observation by the thick clumps of ash and fir trees with which it was almost entirely surrounded. A board, bearing the sign of a red cow, from whence it derived its name of "The Old Red House," with an inscription beneath, purporting that within was to be found refreshment for man and beast hung over the principal doorway, and a neglected garden in front, separated from the common by a broken paling, was filled with choking weeds and straggling briars, among which a solitary monthly rose tree, sole remnant of some former

state of prosperity, might still be seen, wreathing both wall and window with clusters of that bright flower, which lends a grace to the humblest dwelling of the poor, from the earliest hours of spring to the latest days of autumn.

“Hark ye!” said the man, after he had paused in his walk sufficiently long to recover breath, “hark ye!” he repeated, in a tone so deep and so sepulchral that she quailed as if it had actually issued from a tomb, “I am about to bring you to yonder cottage. Why do you shiver and shake? Do you think I am going to murder you?”

Poor child! Very truly might she have answered that she did not only think it, but feel certain of it. She did not speak, however, and only showed her consciousness that he had done so, by one faint ineffectual effort to check the shivering of her mortal anguish, while he went on in a tone of impatient scorn:—

“Pshaw! the time when cruel uncles murdered and supped on their injured nieces are (more’s the pity) no longer in existence. We don’t do these things now, whatever we might *like* to do, and so

long as you obey my directions to the letter,—but, mark me, I only say *so long* as you do that,—your life will be as safe for me, as ever it was under your mother's roof."

A low cry burst from the child's lips at this unceremonious naming of her mother. It was an involuntary cry forced from her by the sudden recollection of what she had been and of what she was at present, but it was repented of almost at the moment of its utterance, for clutching her arm with a violence that renewed all her previous terror for her life, Mr. Sutherland said, in a deep hoarse voice, and with a terrible oath :

" Another such a howl as that, and I will wring your neck off, and bury you just where you stand. Leave off shivering, will you, and tell me what they called you,—Rosalie de St. Arnoul ?"

The child made a gesture of assent.

" St. Arnoul is not really your name, nor Rosalie either, and if you have any value for your miserable life you will never name either of them again. Do you understand ?" he added,

shaking her by way of enforcing an answer, and thus rudely invited, Rosalie sobbed forth,—

“I won’t if I can help it; but if they ask me?”

“Have you no other name to which you would find it as easy to answer?”

“Papa always called me Aileen. It was my aunt’s name, and it is my name also. He liked it better because of that; and besides, he thought Rosalie so long for petting.”

A sudden pang shot right through her conductor’s bosom at this little picture which the child had so unconsciously presented to his imagination of the aged father and the petted child; that father whom he had once called his friend, and whose child nevertheless he was now plotting remorselessly to deprive of her inheritance and to consign to the misery of a life of sin.

Probably the same image of the father whom she had lost for ever was in Rosalie’s mind as well, for some quiet tears rose to her eyes and bedewed the handkerchief that bound them, but she did not dare to discover her emotion, though it

was a minute or more before she completely succeeded in swallowing it down. Her companion, however, had less difficulty in controlling his sensations, and after that one pang over the betrayed friendship of the father, and the intended ruin of the child, he never vouchsafed to give another to the subject, but pursuing the path he had already traced out for himself, with all the reckless intensity of purpose, which was a portion of his nature, he continued:—

“I will tell the person in whose care I am going to leave you, that your name is Aileen Grey, and you must yourself assure them of the fact, while to every other question you will refuse an answer. You will neither tell them who you are, nor whence you came, nor whether you have relations, or whether you have none. And none you really have in fact, for mark me well child! Edouard de St. Arnoul may have chosen to call himself your father, but in reality you are no child of his, and it will be a crime against the law of the land to retain his name.”

“But it is mama’s name also,” said the child

unable entirely to repress her feelings at this passing strange assertion.

"Your mother had no more right to it than you have, and if it had been discovered that she had retained it after M. de St. Arnoul's death, she would have been severely punished. She is dead, however, so it does not much matter as far as she is concerned, but as for you, you are in my power, and your very life depends upon your silence. Do you comprehend?"

"Yes," stammered Rosalie, though in fact she was only growing more and more bewildered as each instant seemed to fold her deeper in a mystery so like a terrible dream that she could hardly even yet believe she was still in her waking senses.

"I should hope you do," Mr. Sutherland replied, catching rather by intuition than by actual exercise of his ears, the hesitating affirmative, as it fell from her lips. "I should hope so, for life and death are depending on your obedience. So long as you are silent upon every event of your past life without exception, I undertake to protect you; but the instant you

break this rule I will abandon you to your fate. And do not flatter yourself that because you do not see me, therefore I am not near you; on the contrary, I shall be ever within call. Not a word, not a look, hardly a thought, or even a dream of yours will escape my knowledge. I shall see all, hear all, know all, and if need be, avenge all; therefore beware! Once more I say, beware of every word you utter!"

If Mr. Sutherland's object was to terrify the child into silence he certainly chose the right way to do it. The very vagueness of his warnings gave them an additional element of horror to her childish imagination, while there was that in his voice and eye when he spoke of vengeance which imparted perfect faith both in his will and power to ensure its execution.

From that moment, whether by night or by day, the unhappy child never felt again as if she were really alone. By day she saw a spy or emissary of her uncle's in every creature that approached her; at night she felt as if he were actually at her side, being clothed to her fevered imagination, in all the additional terrors of an

invisible presence; his arm ever raised to strike, his voice ever audible in each distant murmur. Nay, the very stillness of the hours of repose brought it with yet more awful distinctness to her ears. His eyes (that was the worst of all) his eyes ever glaring on her from out the darkness, prying into all her actions, and reading, as he said they should, every secret of her panting bosom. There was little chance amid such dread fears as these, that she would betray either his secret or her own, the real danger being that body or mind would give way beneath the unnatural strain thus put upon them, and that the grave would be opened for her before her time, or the mad-house receive her living.

Had she died for it, she could not (so terrified was she) have uttered a syllable in reply to his last speech, but the shudder that passed over her frame was more satisfactory to her uncle of her future silence than the most audible assurance to that effect could possibly have been, and feeling certain then that he held her mind as completely in bondage as her body, he moved a little nearer to the red house, placed her in the deep

shadow of its overhanging eaves, and stepping forward by himself, tapped lightly at the door. A window just over the spot where Rosalie was standing, was opened at this signal, and the harsh voice of an old woman cried:

“Who’s below? Be’s it you, Jack?”

“Neither Jack nor Jill,” replied Mr. Sutherland: “is Dick Daredevil within?”

A low murmur as of persons holding a whispered consultation in the passage, followed; after which the front door was cautiously unbarred, and just sufficiently opened to admit the harsh face of the hag, who had answered from the window, peering suspiciously into the outer darkness, in order to ascertain if the visitor were alone.

“There is no one with me,” said Mr. Sutherland impatiently, “open the door at once, woman, and tell Dick Daredevil Mr. Grey is here.”

“Oh, Mr. Grey, is it,” she replied, as if the name were not altogether unfamiliar to her ear. “Here, Dick, you’re wanted,” she added looking back over her shoulder, while she continued, though with some deliberation, to undo the remaining fastenings of the door.

In obedience to this summons, the person whom she addressed as Dick, and who had probably been a concealed listener to the whole conversation, now came forward, and by aiding the old porteress with the bolts and fastenings soon enabled his visitor to enter.

Dick Daredevil was a man of perhaps forty years of age, short, stout, and burly, with more of the rogue than the absolute villain, in his face, while there was even a strong dash of good nature visible in the cunning twinkle of his small black eye.

"Always werry happy to see you, sir," he began as soon as ever the door was open, "won't you walk in and take a airing by the fire. It must be precious cold outside, it must, with that 'ere north wind a blowing across the common, sharp enough to clip the daisies without scissors."

"Send that old hag away," said Mr. Sutherland without vouchsafing a more direct reply to this hospitable invitation. "Send her out of sight and hearing both," he added, "for I have come upon business which admits neither of eyes nor ears save theirs for whom it is intended."

"Be off, old Judy," said the man addressing himself without further parley to the withered portress of the mansion who had evidently been lingering in the passage, with a view to picking up as much information concerning the object of the stranger's visit as the dimmed faculties of a premature old age (the consequence of poverty and dissipation), could convey to her understanding. "Why don't you cut your lucky at once, you old sinner, when you see as the gemman don't want none of your company."

Thus rudely admonished the old dame was compelled to beat a retreat, which she did, however, very reluctantly, muttering to herself all the time.

"Cock him up for a gemman indeed—wot a fine gemman he is. Sinner for sooth! My stars—and if all were knowed as I knows I wonder which is the worst sinner of the two. Poor Judy as sins for meat and drink, and sich like necessities of life, or the fine gemman as sins for the sake of sinning, and not because he's a wantin of his wittles."

She vanished into her own department in the

back settlements of the house by the time she had got thus far, taking care, however, to slam the kitchen door violently after her by way of climax to her argument. Mr. Sutherland waited yet a moment longer to make sure that she would not incontinently re-appear, and then darting once more to the exterior of the mansion he seized hold of Rosalie and pushed her violently before him into the passage where Dick still remained awaiting his good pleasure.

"Why bless us and save us, what have we here?" cried the latter in some astonishment. "I say, mister Grey, is this 'ere skeared thing that you've brought us, a dove or a raven, which?"

"Dove!" said the gentleman, thus addressed, shortly and emphatically responding.

"Humph!" replied Dick, "won't be so long, if she's to bide with me, I suspect. Twenty-four-hours of the old red house is enough to blacken the brightest wings that ever were wore by angels, if such critturs there be, and they really have wings as the story-books tell us."

"Black or white,—put her up some where for

the present, can't you?" said the other vaguely. "I must speak to you alone."

"Here, Hetty," cried the man raising his voice, "not you, old blear eye!" he politely added as Judy peered out at the sound of his voice, from the lower regions of the house. "Send Hetty, will you? and keep your own bag of bones out of sight and hearing if you can. Now, Eesther!"

And Eesther, obedient to the summons, stood before him in a moment.

Seventeen years were probably the outside that she counted on her actual age, though how old she was in the worst ways of knowledge of the world it might have been more difficult to guess. Vice and starvation had already stamped a look of premature age upon her youth, sharpening her well-cut features, and giving them an expression of care and forethought very difficult to associate with our ideas of seventeen. There was much latent fire and energy in her large black eyes, and yet a look withal of listlessness and inertness, as if the energy had been crushed and the mind grown aimless from the mere want

of anything worth aiming at, having been presented to its acceptance. Nor was this two-fold expression the sole evidence offered by those splendid orbs of the two-fold character of their owner, for when they were lifted to your face they might have struck you as being both passionate and bold, but when on the contrary they were veiled beneath their heavy lashes, then they threw a shadow half sorrowful, half sullen, over all her features, that seemed to plead for poor Esther with you, and to whisper that the bold, bad look was not the native growth of the heart within, but of the external circumstances which had surrounded and controlled the development of its passions. At the moment when she obeyed Dick's summons, the good seemed uppermost both in her face and feelings, and the lazy indifference with which she awaited his commands, more than belied by the quick sharp glance, that ever and anon was directed towards the new comers, betrayed her vivid anxiety as to the object of their visit.

“Take that ere young'un up to roost, Hetty,” said the man in a rough but not unkindly voice.

"Let her bide with you for this night, and see that Judy has nothing to say to her, if you value the old gal's existence. She's getting so blasted curious that she'll have her whistle stopped for her some of these days, just to learn her to mind her own affairs for the future. You can tell her I said so if you likes it, and now take the kinchen away, will you, and keep your own ears shut if you can, my gal, for they are a trifle too sharp for my taste already."

Something like a look of compassion crossed the girl's hard, handsome features as Dick finished this speech, but she made no other reply than by taking the hand which Rosalie submissively presented, and drawing her towards a kind of ladder staircase at the end of the passage, which led to the rooms above.

Unluckily the little girl stumbled almost at the very first step she took, and notwithstanding her pity, Esther could not forbear exclaiming impatiently :

"Well I never! Why, little stoopid, did you never go up-stairs in the dark before, that you make such a to do about it?"

"I can't see," said the child in a most piteous voice, for she was frightened at the tone in which this expostulation had been uttered.

"Well, it is dark to—be—sure," responded Esther. "But I suppose I'm sommut of the nature of a cat myself, for I almost thinks as I sees best in the dark. Never mind, however, just two steps more will bring you to the top of the ladder; not indeed that its worth the climbing," she added with a sigh, which had far less reference to the article in question, than to that figurative one which is supposed to indicate the position of ambitious individuals in the social scale.

"But it isn't the darkness only," replied Rosalie, who, with the true instinct of a childish nature, felt just as much encouraged by that last half uttered note of sadness in Esther's voice, as she had been repelled by the harshness of the one preceding; "this handkerchief cuts me, and I am smothered and confused in this great thick veil besides."

"Kidnapped!" said Esther, with a decision which showed she had settled for once and for

ever the question in her own mind, and then, without uttering another syllable, she took Rosalie in her arms and carrying her to the room above, proceeded at once to divest her of the mufflings which had so painfully impeded her breathing.

When these were entirely removed, and Rosalie had gradually recovered the use of her sight, which the bandage had rendered dim, she found herself standing in a dreary, desolate looking chamber, such as she, the petted child of luxury and civilization, had never before set eyes on. A truckle bed pushed far into one dark corner, a couple of ricketty looking chairs, and a three legged table, were all the furniture it could boast of, and even these were only partially visible by the light of a tallow candle, flaring coarsely and clumsily from out of a black bottle, in which it had been stuck for the purpose of a candlestick. Yet if there was a paucity of the ordinary furniture of a sleeping chamber, there was abundance of other articles less usually found in such apartments, to supply the deficiency and fill up vacant places. The naked rafters

of the roof, which formed its only ceiling, were adorned here and there with pendant strings of onions, interspersed with an occasional flitch of bacon and a couple of bunches of well dried herrings. Apples and raw potatoes were piled together in one corner, while in another lay a heap of things which might have been brought from rag fair, or a pawnbroker's shop at least, of such various and opposite uses were the articles that composed it; rough and fine, old and new, gear feminine and masculine, being all mingled together in most inexplicable confusion. Happily for Rosalie, however, in the midst of all this untidiness the bed upon which it was intended she should repose was tolerably clean, and so too, where it was unencumbered, was the floor, though it must be confessed it did not look it, thanks to the many patches of wood with which here and there it had been mended, and which would have betrayed its mouldy agedness, even if the creaking and complaining of the old boards, wherever they were trod upon, or however lightly, had not testified to their length of service.

"Now, little 'un," said Esther, holding the child's hands in both her own, and fixing her black eyes steadily upon her, "what's your name and where do ye come from, hey?"

"He told me my name was Aileen," replied Rosalie, after a moment's hesitation, which told volumes to the sharpened wits of her interlocutor.

"He *telled* you—did he?" she answered with an incredulous smile. "Well now, I should have guessed that you were old enough to have knowed yourself, without the telling of he. And arter all, who is he? or what is he to you? for I rayther imagine he ain't your father."

Rosalie, or Aileen as we must henceforth call her, was just going to answer, when rightly comprehending that the name of her persecutor was of the number of things that in her memory were to exist no longer, she suddenly checked herself and continued silent.

"I see," said Esther, "mum is the word, else he'll wring your neck off with no more to do than if it were a pullet's—ain't I about right there—tell me now?"

Thus adjured Aileen eagerly nodded her head as a sign of affirmation. It was quite a relief to her mind, in fact, to have the mystery of her present position so thoroughly understood, and its penalties so clearly stated.

"Well, I ain't never the gal to put a fellow crittur's neck into jeopardy on purpose," responded Esther, "so I'll ask you no more questions, and now just let me loosen your things a bit, and then get you to bed at once, and have some sleep, for you're all of a tremble, and no great wonder neither, considering what you look like, and where you've come to."

Aileen did indeed want sleep; stunned, wearied, and terrified by the event of the last few days, a sensation was rapidly creeping over her, which might be termed in some sort sleepiness, though perhaps it was more akin to the stupor incident on exhausted nature, and yielding to its suggestions and to the kind hearted encouragement of her new companion, she was about at once to fling herself on the bed, when she suddenly remembered that she had not said her prayers. Never in her childish memory had she yet omit-

ted that nightly duty, and wearied and worn out as she was, she was less inclined than ever to do so now, when, more than ever, she was conscious how much she needed God's protection through the darkness and perils of the hour of night.

With all her anxiety, however, she had some hesitation in naming her wishes to her guardian, for she felt instinctively that they would sound strange in Esther's ears, and might even perhaps offend her; still as sleep was not to be thought of until after their accomplishment, she took courage at last to falter forth :

" Will you hear me say my prayers first, please? they are not very long," she added, wrongly interpreting the expression of Esther's face for one of vexation or reluctance.

" *I hear you* say your prayers!" the other repeated slowly, and with a sort of cold shuddering in her manner, " I hear you say your prayers!"

" They are not very long," Aileen again pleaded apologetically, " and I won't say them all, for indeed I am almost too tired."

" Say 'em then," Esther replied, as if conquer-

ing some hidden feeling by a sudden resolution, "say 'em at once and get 'em over."

Thus ungraciously permitted, Aileen knelt down without further parley, and her murmured prayer was soon falling like a strain of most exquisite music on Esther's ear, winning its way from thence down into the deepest places of her soul.

They were not long, those prayers of Aileen's, and above all they were very simple, needing nothing of the human eloquence of words to interpret of the love they breathed. It was but the prayer which our dear Lord taught his disciples, the "Our Father," as men lovingly have named it, and to this, as the little Catholic child she was, Aileen added the Angelic Salutation, while Esther listened amid thoughts and feelings, oh, how strange! thoughts and feelings which she had no power to define, and no clue by which to do so; thoughts and feelings which she was unconscious even that she was possessed of, but which, nevertheless, had all this time lain dormant in her soul, casting over it a mysterious tinge of sadness, and which might so have lain

even to the hour of her death, if the prayers of Aileen, by suggesting for the first time to her mind the idea of a spiritual world, had not called them into life and action.

“Our Father!” was this the God whose name she had never hitherto heard spoken excepting in the frightful imprecations of her companions, and could it indeed be *that* outraged God, whom this poor child so simply, so lovingly, and so naturally addressed as “Father?” She had said too, “Our Father,” not, therefore, Aileen’s only, but the father of many more as well; and was He then, or could He have ever been the father of Esther also, and had she lost Him by some fault of hers, or had she been unworthy from the beginning to be called His child?

And who, again, was that mother whom Aileen had entreated, and whose assistance she had implored at the death bed of the sinner? Alas! all of death that Esther had ever seen in her young life had been caused by open violence, or reckless dissipation. Death-beds these, to which no sweet mother ever came, or was expected, or even wished for. Death-beds where the

sinner prayed not, even if, as it too frequently happened he did not blaspheme, and where no one ever knelt to pray for, or to console him, or even to endeavour to repress his curses. Death beds, which in the desperate ravings of their victims had indeed sometimes brought to her mind the idea of some unexplained hereafter, but not of a world where God was Father, or where those whom he called thither, were to dwell as children. Glimpses of that other world now came in far other fashion to the soul of Esther—dim sweet thoughts of an eternity such as she had never before dreamed of—visions of pure beings which made her recoil from the coarse sinfulness of her past existence as it now stood unbared to her awakening conscience. Faint shadowings of a love that might fill the void left by human creatures—of a hope that might kindle that love to action,—of a faith in an hereafter that might atone for the hard realities of the present—all these, were at that very moment springing into life in Esther's soul, although she knew it not, although she only knew that she was bowed down by a sense of shame and

sorrow, such as she had never known before, but such as like none other of which she had ever yet been conscious, brought something of comfort and of sweetness with it. Lower and lower her head sank upon her bosom, and she would have rested it perhaps on Aileen's bended brow, but she felt unworthy even to approach her. She had probably never heard of such a thing as sacrilege, and yet sacrilege surely must have been the idea in her mind, for though she was yearning—yearning as the pilgrim for the desert fountains, as the mourner for a word of comfort,—yearning with an intensity of feeling for which there was no explanation in her own mind, to lay her burning sinful heart on the pure bosom of the child, yet still she would not. She felt as if there was no one in the world to whom she could go for comfort, *this* one too innocent, all others too guilty far, and so she turned herself gradually on one side, and drew her shawl over her face as if to shut from her sight the purity that so unconsciously accused her, and then heart-humbled, self-scorning, and wholly crushed she burst into a passionate fit of weeping. The

astonished Rosalie was at her side in an instant; but finding all her timid efforts at consolation vain, she also yielded to the infectious sadness of the hour, and flinging her arms round Esther's neck, half in deference to the sorrows of the latter, half in childish sympathy with her own, burst into tears.

For a long time Esther resisted, or at least seemed insensible to the loving pressure of those baby arms, and if at last she yielded for one short instant to her passionate desire of clasping Aileen to her bosom, the next she flung her from her, as a mother sinking beneath some dread infection might have cast from her the infant she was yearning to embrace. Such varying moods of mind frightened Aileen all the more, that she was far too young to trace them to their source, and her sobs at last became so hysterical that they recalled Esther to her senses. Necessity and nature had both combined to bestow upon the latter the most perfect self command as to her external manner, and now dismissing at once herself and her own cares, where she had so often before dismissed them, down into the deepest

depths of her own heart, she went to the distant corner whither Aileen on her last repulse had hastily retreated, and drawing her to her knee, she wiped away her tears and smoothed her hair, and bade her cry no more in a voice so steady at once, and yet so kind, that it was sure in the end to command obedience. In fact, no sooner had the submissive child become conscious of the change in Esther's manner, than hiding her burning face upon her bosom, she struggled so successfully with her feelings that her sobs soon ceased to be hysterical, and died away at last in the inarticulate moaning of exhausted nature.

"Aileen," said Esther gravely, but kindly, as soon as she saw that the storm of grief had subsided for the present, "don't you cry no more just now, for I wants to say sommut to you."

Aileen looked up, her dark blue eyes and silken lashes still humid in the vanished shower, but she did not speak; she only waited to hear what Esther might have to say, partly perhaps from natural curiosity, but yet more from her anxiety not to offend any of the strange beings upon whom her fate was now depending.

"When I were only half your height, Aileen, I was worser off nor you are, for I had neither a father nor yet a mother. Neither a father nor yet a mother had I," she repeated slowly, as if considering the full weight and meaning of the words she uttered, "nor never had, that I knows of; so I suppose they must have died when I was quite a infant."

"No father—no mother!" sighed Aileen, as if her young imagination could conceive nothing half so sad in the way of human sorrow. "Poor, poor little girl!"

"I never had none," continued Esther, "and in course it follows that I never had a home no more; so the street were ever my only home, Aileen, and it might almost be called father and mother to me too, so far as the perwiding of my victuals went, and the finding me in shelter for the night. I lived in the street, eat whatever I begged or stole (for the keeping of the werry life within me) in the street, slept in the street, under any of its old archways that might serve the turn, excepting, indeed, when any of the tramps about, hired me to exhibit as their babby

for to make their own case more moving, and then they most always gave me a good night's rest as well, though in a bed that had, may be, as many as a dozen more a snoring in it already."

"Poor thing," said Aileen quietly, but with great feeling. "That was indeed being much worse off than me, for I have always had a father and a mother until now."

"I was no one's child," the other went on slowly. "And so no one cared for me, nor troubled themselves about me, excepting, as I said before, when they wanted to make a penny by me. And if I had a father in Heaven, as you said just now, I never knowed it, Aileen, and no one never telled me."

"Our father is our God," Aileen innocently observed in explanation, feeling that Esther might still be rather in the dark on the subject, though far from having any adequate idea of the amount of actual ignorance in which she had hitherto been existing.

"I knows it now, Aileen, but I knew nothing of it then, and none of them as were about me

knowed it neither. If they had, things might have gone differently with I—and, yet, I don't much think they would," she added frankly, after a momentary struggle with that pride which even in the most abandoned still seeks to find excuses for its sin. "I don't much think they would, for the wolf within me a bidding me to steal was louder far than any outside voice a telling me not to, could possibly have been. The dog that has lost his master, the sparrow that sits lonely on the house tops, has no thought for nothing but the scraps that will keep the bare life within them, and I was as lonely and as little cared for, so naturally I growed like them; my daily bread my only thought—my only heed how to get it."

"And you stole for it?" Aileen could not forbear questioning with the lightest possible shade of rebuking in her manner.

"Begged, borrowed, stole it," said Esther, doggedly. "Took whatever comed in my way, or if nothing came, cried myself, perhaps, to sleep in some dark corner, arter having been

hustled off the pavement by them as having homes to go to, found it easier to swear at me for not being in mine than to give me wherewith to find one. Home, forsooth, that was ever and always the word upon their lips, and they never cared to ask, not they—what or where was the home to which they so glibly sent me. Now you see how it were with me all my life time, and how I never rightly were what men do call a child," the girl went on returning to the thread of her story, which Aileen's question had momentarily interrupted; "therefore you will not so much wonder that as I growed older and my wants more pressing, I growed bolder and more desperate in proportion, until I was a object of suspicion to every shopkeeper and barrow-woman in the neighbourhood. Things couldn't go on much longer quietly when that was the case, you know, so one day, I might have been ten, I might have been eleven, I was took and nabbed by the beaks at last."

"Beaks nabbed you!" repeated the bewildered Aileen.

"The polis," Esther shortly subjoined by way

of explanation. "They seed me stealing a roll from a baker's shop! a well-to-do man in the world that baker was, and the bread I stole was but a pennyworth to him, while it was life or death to me to get it, for food had not touched my lips that day; no, nor at any time in the twenty-four-hours before it. I never had been trapped before, so you may guess that I was fairly frightened; but just as I was beginning to blubber like the great baby that I was, Dick Daredevil, (him as you seed in the passage below just now) he stept out of the crowd, he did, and offered, if they would let me go that once, for to pay for the roll himself. That were the first time as ever I set eyes on Dick; but you may believe me, I never forgot that kind act of his'n, and wot's more, I never will."

"And did the baker let you off?" asked Aileen, intensely excited over a tale which was all the more interesting to her young ears that she came from a far-off-land, where the sun is so bright, and the soil so bountiful that such haggard need as Esther was describing is seldom to be met with there.

"Let me off?—not he—yet he didn't care for the roll. Why should he? I might have taken a dozen such, and he never to have missed them."

"Then what did he make such a fuss for?" Aileen indignantly enquired.

"What did he make such a stir for? He said himself it were for conscience sake, and the ends of justice, that he wished to make an example of me; and so for example's sake it was, I suppose, that I had six good weeks of it on the mill, and all along of a scrap of bread that I could have swallowed in two mouthfuls."

"Mill," repeated Aileen, with the bewildered expression which not a few of her companion's words were continually calling to her countenance.

"Treadmill," the other said, as if that would make it clearer. "I wasn't a child in wickedness when I was first put upon it, Aileen, and yet a very babe of innocence, I might have been a going into prison in comparison to what I were a coming out. Howsomdever, I never was so lonesome like again, for Dick, he sought me the

moment I was let out, and when he found as I were a lone child with none to trouble or to care about me, he took me to this 'ere old house, where off and on I've lived with him ever since."

"Then may be he taught you something better than you knew before," said Aileen anxiously. "He taught you, Esther, didn't he?"

"Teached me!" repeated the girl with a short bitter laugh that would have spoken volumes to an initiated ear; "yes, I should say as he did, indeed—to drink, to swear, to—to lead with ruffians the life that ruffians lead; that's wot he teached me, Aileen; but it wasn't his fault, poor fellow, neither, seeing that in course he could only teach as he knowed himself, and such things were all for the most part as ever he'd been learnt."

The tone of relenting softness in which these last few words were spoken emboldened Aileen once more to fold her arms round Esther's neck, and the girl accepted of this mark of sympathy with an humbled tenderness of manner very dif-

ferent from her former passionate and proud recoiling. Then lifting the weary child with something of a mother's tenderness into bed, she whispered gently :

" Go you to sleep now, Aileen, and if any one comes in, 'specially that old woman, keep your eyes shut, and take heed not to answer none of their questions. They won't vex you with too many, lambie, if they thinks you are a sleeping quiet."

" But you are not going!" cried Aileen, holding her fast by the hand. " Oh, Esther, I shall be afraid without you!"

" I must go, my precious, and more for your sake than my own, moreover. Howsoever, I shan't be long away, and wot's more, I shall be so close at hand that I shall hear you if you only whispers, so never you be afeard, but go to sleep at once, and if you've ere another prayer to say, why say it for poor Esther."

CHAPTER IV.

THE steep staircase by which Esther descended after leaving Rosalie was only lighted by means of a small window looking into the room, in which the conference between Dick and his visitor was proceeding at the moment. As she passed this window she paused and looked in, but no sooner had she discovered its present occupants, than quietly unclosing one of the small panes which, for this very purpose perhaps, had been provided with a hinge, she applied herself to listen. The first word that fell on her ear, instantly riveted her to the spot, nothing less than the future destination of Aileen being the sub-

ject in discussion; but for the better understanding of our readers, we will go back yet a little further, in order to put them in possession of all that had passed between the confederates previous to her arrival.

Having first assigned the place of honour to his guest, Dick had seated himself on a wooden settle by the fire, and was about to begin the conversation, when Mr. Sutherland prevented him by saying:

“I got your note at the post office as I came up here. Have you heard anything of my son?”

“Havn’t I though?” responded Dick, stretching his legs negligently along the settle, and accommodating his back by leaning against the wall. “What’s the odds now that I havn’t discovered him for you at last.”

Mr. Sutherland started, and the blood rushed first to his temples, and then retreating as rapidly as it had risen, left both cheek and brow as pale as ashes. He unclosed his lips, too, as if he were about to speak, yet not a syllable came forth; for had his very life depended on it, the

strong man could not at that moment have uttered a single syllable. Dick waited politely a moment longer, thinking he was about to answer, but finding that he continued silent, he went on himself:

“ Arter you first lost sight of him I hear he was to be seen backwards and forwards continually in half the hells of Lonon, until, play high, play low, he must have had precious little change left out of his allowance. A cove as does that sort of thing doesn’t go upwards, you know; it’s against natur he should, I believe, and so it has ended at last in your chap’s being passed on from one low set of sharpers to another, until about two months agone, when I discovered him a sailing in company with one of my chums.”

“ With one of your chums!” cried Mr. Sutherland, a sense of coming ruin creeping over him, such as his worst forebodings for his son had never yet led him to anticipate before.

“ With one of my chums, and with none of the best of them neither,” Dick emphatically repeated. “ Mr. Sutherland, I don’t want to make

the worst of a bad business, I don't; but he's in now with the werry cove as will put a rope round his neck in no time, if he's only half as sharp in following bad advice as I reckon him to be."

"A rope," Mr. Sutherland mechanically repeated, it was all he could say or think of. "A rope, man; did you say a rope?"

"A rope, Mr. Sutherland—Mr. Grey I mean—asking your pardon for disremembering your *incog.*"

"A rope!" the unhappy father repeated, as if even yet uncertain as to the full significance of the word he uttered.

"A rope!" reiterated Dick. "Now you see, sir," he went on, with a becoming air of candour, laying his hand at the same time on the cuff of Mr. Sutherland's coat to bespeak his attention, "I won't say but wot if he had come into my hands alone, he mightn't sooner or later have had a taste of the hulks, but the gallows is wot I hopes as I will never have nothing to say to, and for this reason, chiefly that I'm werry particular about human life, werry

particular indeed, Mr. Grey, whereas John Nightshade—”

“Nightshade again!” groaned Mr. Sutherland, suddenly interrupting his voluble companion; “then he has checkmated me at last.”

“I know nothing about that,” replied Dick, looking a little astonished, “but I know that John is become a reg’lar yokel he is, and we have all the trouble in life in keeping on the sunny side of the perfession with him.”

“Unhappy boy!” cried Mr. Sutherland, unable any longer to repress the agony he was feeling. “Educated as he has been, what can he have in common with such a wretch as that! What does he do for him? What is he to him, that he still continues to influence his actions?”

“What does he do for him,” said Dick composedly; “why, he leads a jolly sort of life no doubt just now, for John gives him our notes to scatter, and uncommon clever at the trick he is, besides being such a swell to look at, that you see, anybody would as soon think of suspecting their grandfathers, as he of a plant.”

"This has been done express," Mr. Sutherland muttered between his teeth. "The tables are turned with a vengeance."

"Possible," said Dick, "but you know I know nothing wotever of your former dealings with John, or how it has happened that he has introooced you among us. Howsomdever, it does seem hard that a promising lad like that should be ticed into such a coil as John is as likely as not to put round his neck; and so if you likes it, and always in course for a consideration, I'll tip you the wink some day when he has none of our notes in his pocket, and then with the help of the beaks you might nab him neatly, and bring him to reason on some small count as would cost him only a judge's sermon and a few weeks of prison somewhere."

"The beaks!—the police," cried Mr. Sutherland, sorrow and anger gladly taking refuge under the semblance of offended pride. "And do you think for an instant, sirrah, that I would wantonly invoke such disgrace upon my own head as the reclaiming my son by such means must inevitably entail. I to parade myself in

every newspaper in the kingdom as the father of a cheat and black leg! No, sir, if he is only to be reclaimed by such a public exposure of his sins and my sorrow, he may continue to riot in his unseemly haunts; he may rot in jail, or tremble on a scaffold before I stir hand or foot to save him."

"As your honor pleases," replied the imperturbable Dick, "you are his guv'nor and knows in course wot's best for he, only I hopes you won't forget that my job was not to mend him, but to find him, and having done so I expects to be paid according."

"I have not forgotten," said the other hoarsely, "and you shall have double, treble the amount, if you do but rescue my boy from the hands of Nightshade."

"Humph, and what would be the terms for he, Mr. Grey? they must be precious good ones, let me tell you, if you'd have him give up the larking life he's leading—a jolly one it is, I know by my own experience, pity only it comes to grief so often."

"He has disgraced his name and mine," the

father answered sternly, "I cannot permit him to remain in England—"

"I should think not indeed," Dick responded with great emphasis, opening his eyes at the same time extremely wide in his astonishment at the simplicity of his employer, "no, indeed, nor the beaks neither, I should say; why Lor' love you, sir, wot with taking much and paying little, he has done enough already, young as he is, to fix him in Botany for the whole term of his natural existence, as the bigs wigs will surelie tell him when he's had up for judgment."

"Well," said Mr. Sutherland impatiently, "I care not a rap what the big wigs say, it is enough for me that I do not wish him to remain here longer. I have, however, more than one important mercantile establishment in America, and if he chooses to go out there, I will undertake to arrange his journey for him, and to give him a moderate but increasing income, until he has sufficiently recovered my confidence to be permitted to return to England and resume his natural position in society."

"Send him to furren parts before his time,"

replied the literal Dick. "Well, it's the only thing that I knows of to save him from a journey a little later at the Queen's expense, but as to his coming back again, there may be two words to that bargain, guv'nor, for the beaks ain't fathers to forgive and forget the moment the mischief's done and can't be helped, and so I may as well tell you first as last, that it will take a good spell of years, to say the least of it, to whitewash some of his tricks out of their rekilections."

"If he consent to my plans, I will as far as may be, without discovering our relationship, take up his debts and make good his swindling transactions; and for the rest you don't mean to insinuate, I suppose, that he has done anything as yet which is above such reparation as money can supply."

"Few things that I know of in this 'ere blessed country are above that kind of reparation," Dick responded with a grin; "and as you rightly observes, Mr. Grey, I don't by no means wish to insinuate that the younker has done anything as yet, which is above the mark of money

to buy in—but mind I say *as yet*—because there's no guessing what he may or may not be up to soon, now that he is fairlie in the hands of Johnny."

"I have said it," said Mr. Sutherland; "you shall have treble what you have already earned, if you only get him clear out of that ruffian's hands, before any deeper violation of the law takes place. And now for the business which has more expressly brought me here to-night, and which, mark you, I expect to be kept at all hazards from the knowledge both of Nightshade and my son."

"Werry good, guv'ner; the kinchen above stairs is about the measure of the shoe as you wants fitted to-night I guess—hey, sir?" and thrusting his tongue into his cheek, Dick pointed with a kind of rollicking affectation of secrecy to the room over head, in which Aileen was domiciled for the night.

It was a moment ere Mr. Sutherland could command himself to reply, he so recoiled from the insolent familiarity of the man; a familiarity, which conscience whispered, arose entirely from

Dick's knowledge that he was about to be entrusted, that in fact he was already more than half cognizant of a secret which if discovered would put him and his patron on equal terms in the estimation of the world. Hitherto, for reasons best known to themselves, Dick had always behaved with a degree of respect towards Mr. Sutherland, which he was little in the habit of offering to any one, however superior to himself in birth or station; but from the instant that Aileen appeared on the scene he had entirely dropt his former air of deference, and had addressed her captor in the hail-fellow-well-met sort of manner which one ruffian uses to another. It was Mr. Sutherland's first taste of the bitter fruit of crime, and being not only a gentleman, but a very proud one, he felt it deeply. Nor was it his pride alone that was wounded by the manner of his quondam slave, for while, by the cunning leer and insolent familiarity with which he was now addressed, he measured the heights from whence he had descended, there was yet worse, a lurking consciousness in his bosom, that from that time forward he would have far less moral

power over Dick, than Dick, by means of this fatal secret, could exercise over him.

It was too late, however, to draw back, even if he had so desired, but this in fact he did not, for he was a man of most absolute resolves, and seldom suffered any after thought to move him from his purpose, even when that purpose did not, as directly as in the present instance, tend towards the gratifying of the two strongest passions of his nature, ambition and revenge. Nevertheless so conscious was he of the dangerous nature of the course he had decided on pursuing, that for a moment he did not speak, and Dick was forced to repeat his question, before he answered shortly :

“Keep her until I claim her, and you shall have a sum sufficient to make the job worth while.”

What good angel was it that caused a shadow to pass over Dick’s hard features at the bare idea of consigning one so young and innocent as Aileen to the teaching of the inhabitants of his mansion? What good angel was it that inspired him even then to urge this objection on his em-

ployer? We know not, but whether it was at the prompting of his own guardian spirit or that of the child herself, sure we are that it will not be forgotten to him at the hour of his death, and that a fuller measure of mercy will be accorded to him then for that he made an effort, however faint and fruitless, to shield her innocence from the fate to which the more heartless ruffian of the two had remorselessly consigned her.

"In course if you wish it, Guv'nor, but ain't she rayther too young and tender for the kind of life we leads among us?"

"Not a bit," said his employer, "Esther will see to that, I trust all that to Esther. She won't be more difficult to feed and physic than any other brat of the same standing I suppose."

"Surelie not," replied Dick, "but it's only fair to let you know before hand, in case you ever wants her back again, that she won't be none the better for her six months training at the old red house, I expect."

"So much the better," responded Mr. Sutherland heartily, "and a word in your ear, my friend; only you make her such a one that her

very mother, if she have one still, would prefer weeping over her in her grave, to receiving her living into her embraces, and you'll find it to your advantage hereafter in the settling of our accounts."

For a moment Dick could not answer, so engrossed was he in staring at Mr. Sutherland's features, convulsed as they were just then, by a host of savage passions, such as the lesser villain at his side, confessed to himself never to have seen depicted on the human countenance before.

"Well, you are a devil and no mistake, I will say that for you," he at last almost unconsciously blurted out, and then as the dark blood rushed to Mr. Sutherland's temples, suddenly remembering himself Dick more civilly continued, "asking your pardon for saying it all the same, though if I had been shot for it, I don't think as I could have helped it just then. And now, if it ain't making too free to ask the question, will you tell me, Guv'nor, if it is a bit of your own flesh and blood as you are giving away so liberal to the evil one?"

"It is the flesh and blood of my enemy," Mr. Sutherland replied, as curtly as if in these few words there was an answer all sufficient for the rude nature he was addressing.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" returned the other. "Well, let me see—there's old Nan, now. If I turns her loose on old Nan, her edication, as far, at all events, as the lingo is concerned, will be complete in next to no time—and quite to your satisfaction too; I'll answer for that, Mr. Sutherland."

"On the first day of each half-year," returned that gentleman, laying a small heap of gold upon the table, "I shall be here to pay the stipend. This is the first instalment, and for this you are to teach her to drink, to swear, to do all the ill-deeds in short, of which a child is capable, in order to fit her hereafter for the deeper delinquencies of the woman. And never you venture, Dick Daredevil, as they call you, to face me again, if you have not succeeded in polluting both the heart and intellect of that accursed brat, and degrading her in the eyes of the world, until the lowest of the flash companions of my

son would feel lowered by any open communication with her."

"Hallo! old boy. Have you never a cloven foot for to show there, hid away under your thingummies?" cried Dick, starting from his recumbent posture, and eyeing his employer with a look of undisguised disgust at this laying bare of a scheme of vengeance, which made the blackest of his own black deeds seem innocent by comparison.

"By jingo," he went on rapidly, "I a'most fancies as I smells the brimstone, and I ain't too sure that I don't no more, for the devil himself surelie must be at the bottom of such a coil as this against a innocent little crittur, as could no more have done you any real harm as yet, nor the lamb could have swallowed the wolf."

"It was the wolf that swallowed the lamb at last, however," replied Mr. Sutherland, with a grim smile, "and how much soever it may be regretted, he is likely enough to do the same sort of thing over again, I should say, whenever and wherever a similar opportunity may happen to occur!"

Dick eyed Mr. Sutherland intently for a moment, and then without hesitation in his manner said,—

“ It’s past belief, such spite against a babby ; but asking your pardon once more for the observation, I do hope Mr. Sutherland you have done nothing like this.”

And Dick swept his hand with an expressive gesture across his own thick wind-pipe as he asked the question—“ I do hope you’ve done nothing of that sort to none of her friends ?”

“ Pshaw, man, I have not,” said Mr. Sutherland, coldly. “ If that’s what you mean, I have done no murder.”

“ Because,” continued Dick, with the air of one who either had not heard or gave very little credit to his denial, “ It is altogether undeniable that the affair has a ugly look, and I might easily get into trouble, if any witnesses to the fact were to turn up hereafter, as they sometimes will do in such cases in a very unproper and unfeeling manner.”

“ I tell you, fool,” said Mr. Sutherland, now growing really angry, “ there is no blood in the

case at all, and if there were, do you think I'd be idiot enough to show *you* the spot? No! no! Death would not serve my turn half so well as life—such a life as this to which I have doomed her—and almost I could have wished the mother living still," he could not forbear adding between his clenched teeth, "that she might see and rue the effect of her own proud boastings on the fortunes of her child."

There was an energy of purpose in Mr. Sutherland's words and manner now, that would have compelled the most sceptical to believe, and for more reasons than one, Dick felt infinite relief in arriving at the conviction that he might safely rely on the verity of his employer's assertions.

Any connection with a downright murderer he always eschewed on principle, fearing it might end in bringing his own precious person into unpleasant contact with the hangman, for whom he felt, as he professed, a most decided objection; whereas child-stealing was only a transportable offence at the outside, and in this instance could hardly even have been brought home to him at

all, seeing that he was merely the receiver of the stolen goods, and in utter ignorance as to the mode in which they had come into the hands of his employer.

So far he was much easier in his own mind than he had been a short time before, when all the instincts and experiences of his ruffian life were tending to convince him that the man of fierce and unbridled passions at his side, must in the natural course of things, long ere this have written them in blood; nevertheless, there was still enough of a once kindly nature lingering about Dick, to make him very unwilling to undertake even the less guilty part assigned him by his employer. Not indeed that in the course of his own career he had not been the moral destroyer of many children, by encouraging them in the evil deeds to which Mr. Sutherland was anxious he should familiarise Aileen; but then such children were already on the road to ruin, he had not deliberately led them to it. Born *of* iniquity often, and *in* it always; nursed as it were in its very lap, and so familiar with its deeds and so voluble in its language, that it

ever seemed to him but little harm, if indeed he thought it any, to entice them from the mere knowledge and love of crime to its actual commission. In the case of Aileen, however, there was no such excuse as this; nothing which he could urge to his own conscience in extenuation of the deed.

She was so young, so unresisting, and so helpless; she had, moreover, so evidently been brought up in the sanctity and refinement of some home from whence the very name of vice had been carefully excluded, that even his hardened nature shrank from the idea of introducing her into the coarse atmosphere of villainy in which he himself breathed most freely, and for one brief generous moment it actually crossed his mind to reject Mr. Sutherland's proposition altogether. It might not be, however. Too well he knew that the banker held him to his allegiance by a thread, which, if pulled tightly, might draw him to a prison, and although he rejoiced in the idea that he also had an important secret of that gentleman's in his possession, he nevertheless knew the world too well, to feel sure that the

word of a convicted felon would weigh much in its opinion against the character of one of the wealthiest of its denizens. To do him justice, also, the spirit of revenge held no prominent place among Dick's household vices, and he was therefore any thing but likely to consider that the condemnation of Mr. Sutherland, even admitting that he could have obtained it, would at all compensate for his own dreary residence and enforced labour in a convict prison.

" 'Twon't be no manner of use to talk to him," he muttered to himself, while glancing covetously at the tempting little heap of gold that lay before him on the table, and then the thought rushed into his mind (that thought which has so often already been an inducement to the commission of crime), " If I don't do it for him, he'll easy enough get some one else that will, and excepting me and Hett, there ain't another two of the same sort in Lonon as wouldn't lick her to death as soon as look at her, if the old gemman only made it worth while to do so; therefore if I don't strike a bargain with him, I lose the shiners, and the child loses we,

and so my wirtue be only an ill convenience to us all."

During this mental soliloquy Dick's eyes for the most part were riveted upon the gold, excepting, indeed, once, when he raised them to the ceiling in a faint, ineffectual attempt at freeing his mind from the temptation that lay glittering before him. Mr. Sutherland knew his man, and waited quietly (without even deigning to influence his decision by a look) until Dick's avarice should have conquered his better nature, or his conscience at all events have been lulled to sleep by one or other of the ingenious devices which minds of a certain calibre always appear to keep by them ready made for the purpose.

"Well?" he condescended to ask at length. He had not apparently lifted his eyes or even turned his head, and yet he seemed to know intuitively the very moment when his tool had arrived at the conclusion most favourable to his wishes.

"Well, gnve'nor?" Dick repeated in an interrogative manner, "sommun else in course will get a offer of the job if I declines it?"

Mr. Sutherland nodded assent.

"And it follows in course that if that 'ere innocent little crittur is to be kept in quod, whether or no, I may just as well pocket the blunt myself as let any one else have the benefit of the bounty."

"Just so," replied the tempter.

"Therefore," continued Dick, drawing the money greedily towards him, and jingling it lovingly in his large bony hand, "you may look upon the thing as done—done, guve'nor, and no mistake, and so with your leave I'll pocket the consideration at once."

"And you'll beware of forgetting the conditions upon which you take it," Mr. Sutherland sternly added.

"Ain't very likely to do that, being such as they bees," Dick replied very soberly. "Howsoever I'll spare no pains (as shop gents are in the habit of saying) to give you every satisfaction in my power, though it's very like taking a ticket to hell before one's time, for to promise to do so."

"Pshaw," said Mr. Sutherland—scorn and

an uneasy conviction contending in his manner. "Don't you pretend to come over me with that sort of rubbish. Trust me, a man's mind is quite hell enough for its possessor here or hereafter either, without going to another world to find one."

"Uncommon comfortable doctrine that, for we gemmen of the pad and pick-lock surelie," said Dick in a dubious manner. "Only wish I could feel as sartin of it as you do, guve'no'r; which I don't by no means do, though there are times when one's sleep would be the sounder for the notion."

"Old woman's rubbish, nothing more, all that stuff about hell and future retribution. Put it out of your head altogether, my friend, or it will make you as moped as an old cat in a kitchen. And now I must be going, for it is almost sunrise—must not be a word about this little business to Nightshade—and for the rest, remember!"

"Well, I ain't no scholard, I know that," muttered Dick, as he watched the retreating form of his employer from the door of his mansion,

but if there isn't a hell already, I'm blowed if there oughtn't to be one made o' purpose for the sake of such as he. Blast him with his filthy vengeance. They scragg a poor fellow for just cutting the throat of some old reprobate as most likely is half way down to hell and the grave already, and this here smooth-spoken villain can come plottin and plottin as much as he pleases against a innocent babby, and just because he's rich and can pay for silence, none of us dare to say a word against him. Bury my body, what's that for?" he cried starting violently as a hand was laid suddenly upon his shoulder. "Why, Hetty, now! what's the row, lass? You havn't been a listening all this time, havn't you though?" he asked quickly, struck by the peculiar expression of her countenance.

"No matter whether I have or not," she answered gravely. "You shan't have nothing to say to this business with my good will, that I can tell you, father. So if you're in the mind to go on with it still, you'd best look out for a gal as will be more ready than I to help you."

"Help me to what, Het? I'm blest if I don't

think you've gone clean out of your senses," said Dick, his conscience, for all his air of innocence, beginning to prick unpleasantly beneath Esther's calm, yet rebuking glances. "Least wise I never seed you look at me in that 'ere fashion before, my gal."

"Perhaps, you never seed me when I were a feeling so before, Dick, but I didn't come to talk to you about my looks, but only just to say that you shan't lay a finger on that child for evil, you shan't learn her nothing wotsomever that has shame or sorrow in it."

"Shan't I, indeed? And pray why not if I chooses, young woman?"

"Because I don't wish it no how, and so you won't; for Hetty's sake you won't. For Hetty's sake," she repeated, putting her hand on her adopted father's shoulder, "the child as you took from the street and gutter, the treadmill and the prison; the child as you fed, and clothed, and cared for, when there were no one else would do it for her; the child as, wotever else you teached her, you teached her at least the dear name of father; the child as has been a true

child to you in the midst of her evil doings to all others; the child as you've been a loving father to. however careless and cruel others may have thought you. For her sake, Dick, and for the sake of the true love and kindness there has ever been betwixt us, you will do nothing you have promised in the way of leading the little one up stairs to ruin."

"What's the odds that I don't tho'," said Dick, trying to bluster a little in order to conceal the effects which her passionate entreaties had really made upon him.

"Just this," said Esther quietly, "that if you don't swear to me by the holiest oath you know of (if may-happen you know any) to let that there innocent alone, then I swears to you to quit the Red House at once, and never to come back again; no, not from this ere blessed moment to the werry last one of your life or mine."

"No, now, don't you go for to swear no such a thing," Dick hastily responded, "for I couldn't live without you, gal, that's the werry blessed truth it is, and rayther than let you go, I'll take any blasted oath you choose to impose."

" You needn't trouble yourself at all to take any oath as you don't intend to bide by, since it will be no manner of use in the way of keeping me with you," the girl quietly responded.

" Won't I bide by it tho'? You wait and see, that's all, as the caterpillar said to the robin when it were a twitted for its want of wings. Why, you may believe me, gal, I had no great liking for the job even at the outset, and in course am all the more ready to give it up now that I finds it contrary to your feelings likewise; taking the cove's jingo all the same, Hetty; I suppose you've no objection to that, my gal."

" Must you tho'?" the girl doubtfully responded. " Better not, I should say. It may bring you into trouble yet, if ever the trick should be discovered by he."

" Must's the word, for all that, Hett. Why, don't you see, stoopid, to refuse the jingo would be all as one as to refuse the job likewise, in which case he would lose little time enough, I expect, in handing the kid over to some less particular rogues than ourselves; a change of measure

that would be a precious sight worser for her nor we."

" You are about right there, Dick, I'm almost afraid, for he must be too deep in the mud already not to go further still if need be. Any how it can't be no great wickedness to take the money when it's only for the child's own sake we do so, and who knows, Dick, but what our cherishing of this poor lambie now, may not be the saving of we some day, if ever we're bringed up to judgment, as I suppose at last we shall be."

" By the living jingo, but you are a brick in earnest," cried Dick enthusiastically, as the words of Esther conveyed quite a new idea to his mind. " Why, as you say, my gal, in course, if ever any of her people happen to turn up, and that they are rich and well to do in the world (as judging from her appearance is most likely) we may snap our fingers at judge and jury both, if we can but prove we have saved their kinchen from the black ruin, this here villain has designed against her--"

" It were of another sort of Judge altogether

that I was thinking at the moment," said Esther with a half mournful smile. "The Judge I mean as drunken Tom Walker said he seed a waiting for him the day he died. Not but wot it's likely to do us a good turn in this world as well, Dick, if ever we comes to grief, as in course we shall, when our time is up, and we've run to the end of our tether."

"Do you think now, Hetty," cried Dick eagerly, his previous conversation with Mr. Sutherland suddenly recurring to his recollection, "Do you think there is a Judge and another world? as the white ties tells us. Yonder blusterer says there ain't, and that it's all lies and old woman's rubbish they do talk about it."

And he pointed in the direction Mr. Sutherland had taken, to indicate that he was the person thus disrespectfully alluded to, looking eagerly and almost wistfully in Esther's eyes the while for an answer to his question. But she only cast them down and answered sadly,—

"May-happen, like we, Dick, he has good cause to dread it."

CHAPTER V.

THE two or three next succeeding weeks passed sadly and wearily over Aileen's head. Business, probably of no very reputable nature had called Dick Daredevil away; and Judy also, he had contrived to dispose of in one of the many other haunts of iniquity with which he was connected, so that Esther and the child were left entirely alone. The watch over the latter was, however, none the less vigilant on that account, for though in all other ways, Esther was as kind as could be, she had yet received such injunctions on this head from her adopted father, as for her own sake, and even for Aileen's, she dared not disobey.

The child accordingly found herself in the strictest sense of the word a captive, being neither allowed to leave the house, nor the room that had been at first assigned her, nor even until after sunset, to stand at the open window; and thus deprived of light and air, things as needful to the well-being of childhood, as to that of the flowers of the field, poor Aileen began visibly to fade. The anguish also of that terrible separation from her mother, which, at first had been dulled by the sense of immediate danger to herself, returned in a yet more heart-breaking and irremediable form than as if circumstances had allowed it to burst forth naturally in the beginning, and a settled melancholy, very pitiful to behold in one so young, gradually took possession of her soul. Unfortunately there was nothing in that dreary mansion to divert or ameliorate such thoughts. Esther was often obliged to leave her alone for hours, for though Dick had disappeared, other mortals rough and rude as he was, with hearts yet more impervious to kindly feelings, were continually on the come and go, and she was liable both night and day to be called upon

to serve them — nevertheless, every moment that she could steal from such occupation she devoted to the soothing of poor Aileen's sorrows. She would take her lovingly in her arms, and whisper in her ear the hopes she herself really entertained of the child's future restoration to her friends; and then, yet further to divert her attention and amuse her, she would tell her whatever tales she knew, and deemed she could tell without sinning against that childlike purity of Aileen's, which had won so wonderfully on her imagination. Alas! small and scant was poor Esther's stock of such harmless lore; and so when she had told the tale (new to Aileen's ears at any rate) of Whittington and his cat, and of beauty and the beast, and of the babes in the wood, which last, from its similarity to portions of the child's own history was regularly called for twice, and as regularly received with tears, it then became Aileen's turn to confide to Esther's attentive ear every story she had ever read, or ever heard, and often, even it must be added, every tale that her own powers of invention could supply her with at the

moment. Thus she would sometimes tell of the boy drifted out to a desert Island, to whom God showed himself so specially a Father, because that for the time being he could have no other, and because that the child looked most confidently for this mercy at His hands; or else her story was of that other child, who, in the deep and lonely woods questioned and dreamed of Christ until his cross gleamed out upon her earnest eyes, shining among the stars of Heaven—or it was of yet another still, whose angel had walked this world visibly beside her, bending his bright brow to earth and folding up his seraph wings whenever his charge offended against the innocence demanded by his presence—or oftener even than of these, she told of saints and martyrs—beings of whom Esther had absolutely never even heard before,—of those who had lived for Jesus, or had died for Jesus,—of those who had never sinned, or of those who had repented their sinning, in sack cloth, and in ashes. Aileen had not only been religiously brought up, but she was also possessed of an essentially religious mind, that is to say, a mind so naturally loving and con-

fiding that it turned as spontaneously, as the flowers to the sunshine, to the contemplation of God's great love for us, and could find in every incident by which that love has been unfolded, as much food for pleasant fancies, as minds less fervently constituted can discover in the fictions and romances of the world. Generally, therefore, the tales she chose had an abundant sprinkling of the religious element in their composition ; and simple and childlike as they were, they yet gave to Esther ideas of right and wrong, of God, and of God's relations and dealings with the human race, such as she had never before dreamed of, and such, as perhaps by any means less simple, she would have had a difficulty in receiving.

Seldom indeed it chanced in those tales of Aileen, that the mother and the Child Divine were without place or mention. Now it was the Babe of Bethlehem weeping in his mother's arms ; then the Redeemer on the cross and the mother at its foot, He bleeding away his life for the love of man, she with the sword of sorrow in her bosom, and both so sorrowful, and all for us ! Aileen could be eloquent upon either theme, or

at any rate her listener thought her so, and as time went on, she returned to them all the oftener, that with a child's quick instinct she perceived how much deeper was the impression made by these on Esther's mind than by any of her other stories. Heaven was in truth as yet all too high, and hell too deep for the creature she addressed. The joys of the one were simply beyond the power of her material nature to desire or comprehend, while the threatened sorrows of the other had seldom power to produce more than a despairing shudder, or a ghastly attempt at mirth, yet more distressful to the young child's soul; but Esther became all a woman, at least the better part of her woman's nature seemed to rise spontaneously to the surface, when softly and quietly, yet strongly and truthfully still, as real feeling ever must, Aileen told her of that sweet Lord who came from His own high Heaven to die for us, and of the fair virgin mother, who received him and nursed him on her spotless bosom.

Aileen never paused to reason, (she was all too young for that) upon the causes of the

various moods of mind which her desultory talk so visibly awoke in Esther; but she felt (and that was a more certain guide by far) she felt that her strange attendant was ever most lovable, and most loving, after Christ and his dear mother had been the theme of her childish story. So, gradually, and almost unconsciously to herself she returned to it the oftenest, and dwelt upon it the longest; and the more she did so, the more did poor Esther hang upon her words, and turn to her as to the one sole humanizing influence of her rude existence; until there never was a love more faithful or more fond, than that which the poor street-wanderer harboured in her bosom, for the pure and guileless being committed to her keeping. Strange to say, she never once questioned Aileen of her past adventures, though quite resolved not to allow her to be taken from her care without arriving at this knowledge; at present she felt it was more advantageous to the child to be practised in the reserve which had been imposed upon her, and therefore resolutely repressed Aileen's natural yearnings to unburthen herself of

her secret, by pointing out the danger she would incur if Mr. Sutherland, (Mr. Grey, as she always called him, that being the only name by which she knew him,) should chance to discover that his orders had been disobeyed. And she spoke not of her own life either. Not for worlds would she have dimmed the brightness of that young spirit, by the revealing of a single item in her tale of guilt; albeit she sometimes sought to relieve her seared conscience, and struggling heart by laying her head upon Aileen's lap, and after telling her with burning cheeks, and tears of anguish how that she was very wicked, and that she had been wicked even from her very cradle—to whisper then the happier thought that perhaps after all, things might have gone better with her—that she might have been innocent as Aileen herself, or faithful as the ship-wrecked boy, or loving and true as any other of the heroes and heroines of Aileen's little stories—if like them she had had a visible guardian angel—a mother, or an elder sister, or a father, as loving as Dick, though not like him in his close companionship with crime—any one, in short,

even a hard and cross-grained mistress to rescue her from starvation, and so arrest her footsteps in the path of sin. Alas! it was too late now; that was ever the cry of her aching heart—too late for the innocence of the guiltless, and of the innocence of penance, she, as yet, knew nothing; though all unconsciously to herself, its sweet and bitter waters were beginning to well up spontaneously in her soul—"Too late! too late!" It was the cry of her soul—the agony of her newly awakened conscience—the word for ever rising to her lips, the thought that often bathed her face in a flood of tears as she listened to the prayers of Aileen.

"Do not cry so, darling Etty," said Aileen one night as she rose from her knees. "I cannot bear it. It makes me think how mamma must be crying too for her lost Rosa, and then I cry all night long myself after you have put out the candle."

"You cry for that," said Etty sadly. "But believe me, you'd have had much more cause to cry, my precious, if you'd never had no mother at all to learn you wot was evil."

"But still," replied Aileen, "I am a very little girl, I know, and not at all wise either; but still—"

"But still," interrupted Esther, without allowing her to utter her little word of comfort. "Little crittur as you are, and not half my height or years, you've made me feel some how the difference between good and bad, though you ain't a told me yet, because I suppose you cannot, how to make black white—to undo the sin I means that a body has done already."

"It can't be undone certainly," said Aileen, thoughtfully and quietly. "But it can be forgiven, Etty, and that is almost as well."

"Ah," moaned Esther, "that's jist where the shoe's a pinching, Aily. Since I've knowed you, my blessed one, I do cry out in my heart at nights, and at times, if you'll believe me, all night long, I do, to be forgiven. But who's to tell me that I am so? and (for I may as well tell you everything at once), to one like I, with a sin for every day of the year, and sommut over and above to spare besides, it's dreadful, it is, not to feel sartain sure about it."

Happily for Esther's permanent good, there was not only a native simplicity in Aileen's heart, which never permitted her palliating what she thought the truth, by way of soothing the feelings of her companion, but she was also, in fact, far too young to be able to measure or even comprehend the agony of remorse, which day after day that they spent together, surged higher and higher in Esther's soul. Now, therefore, she only echoed the poor girl's words, "It is dreadful!" and then went on :

" Yes, dear Etty, it would be dreadful to feel unforgiven. But that we never need, you know, for if we only tell our sins in confession, and resolve never to commit them any more, God has promised to forgive, and so we may feel certain that He will!"

" Wot tell our sins—every one of 'em?" cried Esther.

" It would be no use to tell only some, dear Etty."

" Dick would never allow of me doing that!" cried Esther almost angrily; " why he's been art and part, he has, in every black deed as I've

ever done for these ten years past an' more, and it would be all as one as peaching upon him to tell 'em to any one else wotever."

Aileen tried to make her comprehend something of the sacred secrecy of confession, but Esther would hardly listen. The idea of voluntary disclosure was naturally terrible to one whose mode of life made her dread betrayal as the worst of evils; and she continued vehemently to protest "that not to save body and soul together would she utter a word to the disparagement of Dick," until finding that Aileen, instead of answering had laid her head on her bosom, and was weeping quietly on that place of refuge, she broke off her angry exclamations to ask in her quietest and most affectionate manner:

"Wot ails my darlin? Wot ails my precious one? Won't you tell your own poor Etty?"

"I can't," said the sobbing child, "for I don't well know myself. But I am weary and sad, dear Esther. It is so long since I've been shut up here, and the air seems all on fire."

Esther rose, and carrying Aileen to the window, unclosed the lattice, and suffered the

cool night air to blow in upon her forehead. One or two roses, out of season, were blooming on the neglected tree, as it hung loosely here and there suspended by chance nails from the wall. These Esther gathered and placed in Aileen's feverish fingers.

"Oh, how bright and cool they look!" cried Aileen, looking for the moment as if she herself was reviving in the freshness of their bloom. "It reminds me of beauty and the beast, the first story you ever told me after I came here; do you remember, Etty?"

"And I am the beast, I suppose," Esther answered with a mournful smile.

"No, that you are not, no more than I am beauty!" cried Aileen eagerly. "But oh, dear Esther, even the beast was not so cruel as to shut up beauty in a close hot room like this. She at least had flowers and waterfalls to look at, and beautiful gardens and lawns and woods to walk in."

"And a beast to eat her up like nothing at all when she came back," Esther ventured to interpose.

"But he didn't eat her up in the end, you know, and I don't believe he meant to do it at all even in the beginning," replied Aileen as earnestly as if she were discussing an historical fact, and clearing a real character from unjust aspersions; "and so, dear Esther, in some things beauty was much better off than I am, for I shall die if I am left here much longer, I know I shall; I never can breathe rightly in this hot, close room, and when you are not with me I feel as if I were dying already of weariness and sorrow."

Esther looked anxiously at her as she uttered these last few words, and saw that in truth anxiety and confinement were already making fearful ravages upon her appearance. She made no direct reply, however, but leaving the room soon afterwards, returned in a very few minutes with a cloak and bonnet in her hand.

"See here," she said with a half smile, "never you talk again as if Etty were worse nor a beast to you, but cover yourself up in these ere thingummies, and I'll take you for a little outing on the common."

"Outing, dear Etty—do you really mean that

I shall go out for a walk?" cried the delighted child. "But it is quite dark," she added glancing timidly through the casement—"and the stars are beginning to appear already."

"Well, then," responded Esther, in her most cheery manner, "as we can't order out the sun to light us, wot is to hinder we from walking in the star-light?"

"Oh nothing," cried Aileen, joyfully. "It will be almost more amusing I think than daylight. Newer, certainly it will be—for I don't remember ever to have taken a walk—a regular walk you know, by starlight."

"I believe you," Etty answered with that indescribable touch of sadness which she so often and so unconsciously infused into her expressions. "Contrary-wise, I should say, as you've been among them as deemed the merry sunshine above your head scarce good enough to touch ye—God help you and them, for the dark rough days is on you now, and no one to lighten them but poor, sinful Esther."

And as if to compensate for the ill-tricks of fortune to which she had alluded, it was with a

double tenderness in her manner that Esther proceeded to envelope Aileen in the wrappings she had brought; after which, taking her in her arms, she carried her down the creaking staircase, and so out through the narrow passage into the free, fresh air beyond.

It was a lovely evening, with just such an air of quiet sadness in its gloom as harmonized well with the mood of Esther. The moon had not yet risen, but the stars showed all the brighter for her absence, and notwithstanding the season of the year, the air came over the heath so softly that even Aileen's India-nursed constitution did not suffer from the contact. On the contrary, her spirits rose the moment her foot touched the heather, and she would have run on and laughed aloud in the exuberance of her childish gladness if Esther had not held her fast, entreating her to move quietly until they were out of sight and hearing of any chance occupant of the mansion they had quitted. This was enough for Aileen; and repressing the vehement desire of her young heart to shout and sing, she walked in silence until having ascertained by a long,

cautious look that they had left the Red-house considerably in the rear, she ventured at last to whisper:—

“ May I speak now, Esther? ”

Esther nodded her permission, and the child went on.

“ You said the men would peach upon you to Dick if they saw me out. What is the meaning of that? I thought peach was nothing but a kind of fruit.”

“ I didn’t ought to have said it to you, Aileen. I had ought to have said, that they would tell him you were out.”

“ But why oughtn’t you to have said it,” persisted Aileen, whose curiosity was not easily satisfied. “ There’s no harm in saying it, is there? ”

“ No great harm, surelie,” said Esther. “ But then there ain’t too many of my words as I can say as much for, and so you see, Aileen, I try to use none of ‘em at all when I talk to you, for I wouldn’t have you grow up to use my lingo, not for the universe—stars and all.”

“ Many of your words? ” repeated Aileen.

"What words, I wonder? Sometimes certainly you do say words that I can't understand, and that I never even heard before."

"Aye," Esther answered, with a little touch of bitterness, not against Aileen, but against her own evil destinies, in her manner. "You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, and them words do stick like burrs to my tongue whether I wishes or not. But they ain't yours, my birdie, so you mustn't use 'em. No! nor ask their meaning neither, of me nor any one else no more. Will you pass me your word for that, Aileen?"

"I will," repeated Aileen, feeling again that confused sort of fear which many of Esther's words and ways impressed upon her. "But I wish you would tell me why?"

"Why? why?" the other impatiently repeated! "Because, they ain't words fit for a christian child to utter—that's the cause—and the why—and more than enough I thinks. Don't you, Aileen?"

"But you are a christian, too," persisted Aileen, to whom the word peach both in its original acceptation, and in Esther's free translation of it,

sounded so very innocent, that for a moment she was tempted to think the latter over scrupulous and particular on the subject of language.

“A Christian! are I?” responded Esther. “I’d be merry thankful if you could make that clear, Aileen—but I never did hear myself called such before, and I don’t believe there is any one here abouts, except yourself, that would even think of putting that good word upon me.”

“At any rate,” continued Aileen, to whom this last observation was simply incomprehensible, “if your words are bad for me, they must be bad for you as well, and you oughn’t to use them either, Etty.”

“Havn’t I telled you already,” said Esther bitterly, “that them words is a kind of second-natur to me, and slip off my tongue before I even guesses that they are on it. But with you it is different altogether, Aileen—you know nothing of them—words and meaning—you know nothing of them, no more nor if you was a babby still, and that’s why I wants you never to begin them, which is much easier, let me tell you, than to forget them arter you’ve been teached

them. "Lor' bless us, wot is that," she cried, interrupting herself, while Aileen screamed aloud as a small dark figure popped up from behind a clump of furze-bush, as suddenly as if it had risen from the bowels of the earth itself.

As a matter of course, Aileen clung tightly to her protectress, entreating her to go back; but after one keen scrutinising glance, the latter pronounced the unearthly looking vision which had appalled her, to be only "poor Jim a gathering chick-weed for the market," and instantly greeted him with a kind,—

"Good evening, Jim, you are late on the hill to-night, gathering chick-weed for the birdies, ain't you?"

The boy raised his blue eyes to hers. They were large and lustrous, yet with a wandering expression in them visible even in that uncertain star-light.

"Ough! aye!" he responded after a moment's thought, "Up early and down late—that's ever and always the poor boy's song, if he wouldn't want to thry a spell in the 'house.' "

"But I thought you was kept at home for the

most part to help mother at her trade. She's a boot-stitcher, aint she—”

“ Troth is she, and so am I,” he answered. “ Leastways, when there are boots enough for the stitchin of two—”

He paused a moment as if collecting his thoughts, and then proceeded in a confidential manner,—

“ I wouldn’t dare for to say it in the big city below there, Hetty, but sure the masther we work wid is a hard man he is, and he gave me next door to nothing at all for the work mother and I done for him to-day. And that’s why I’m up here unbeknowns’t to anyone, just to see if I couldn’t get a handful of chick-weed to add to it, for the mornin’ market.”

“ But Lizy is the weed-seller, ain’t she? and are you sure as you knows the harticle when you sees it, my man?” replied Esther, with some doubt visible in her manner as to the boy’s efficiency for his self-elected occupations.

“ Ah, thin, and why wouldn’t I, Hetty? don’t I know daisies and boothercups, and-tom-and-till, and pansies; and why wouldn’t I know chick-

weed when I seen it, I wondher?" the boy answered with some annoyance visible in his manner at Esther's evident incredulity.

"Why wouldn't you indeed," replied the girl unwilling to offend him. "And I sees as you do too," she added, taking a handful of the green-weed out of his basket, and examining it by the star-light. "But who on 'arth in that great cold hearted city yonder, do you suppose will be green enough to buy such poor straggling weedies as these for their twitterers? Why, man alive, the merry sparrows on the house-top would be too sarcey to look at 'em."

"Faix and meself doesn't know before hand who'll buy, or who won't," the boy answered composedly. "But any way—may be God 'ill put it into the hearts of some one to take them for pity sake, though I will say this for the quality, that they do be often so busy taking care of themselves, that sorrow the ghost of a thought they have left to throw away on the poor."

"The quality," repeated Esther, as if she hardly had caught his meaning. "Oh, its the

nobs I daresay, as you are a meaning to speak of."

" Quality or nobs, sure it's all the same! Lords and ladies, I mane, that do be always livin in clover, and know next to nothing of winter, barring the ice on the Sarpentine. Musha, and isn't it the world's wondher, Hetty, dear," continued the boy, as a new idea struck him, " how they do rowl themselves up in their fur things afore they venture upon it. Many's the time I've stood there and watched them, the teeth chattering in my head for cowld and hunger, and myself scarce able to keep from making a grab at the coats on their backs, just to tache them to remember the boy that had none."

" Ah," replied Esther, half as it seemed in sorrow, and half in scorn. " There be hard hearts in Lonnon as don't altogether belong to lords and ladies only. From the city bank to the huckster's stall, it's just the same; all so busy a driving at their own consarns, that if you'll believe me they'd be ready to quarrel with the werry blessed sun of Heaven itself, so only as it seemed to come between them and their golden

gains. Well, I ain't never likely to be rich myself, and wot's more, having knowed starvation. I've learnt to be pitiful to them as are starving also, so here's a copper for you, Jim, it's the only one I've got about me; and now you'd best cut off home as fast as you can, for there do be folks upon the hill at night sometimes, that you'll be none the better, nor the richer for falling in with!"

The boy himself seemed seriously to incline to the same opinion. He fixed his eyes upon her face with that strange expression half-vague, half-intelligent, that they so often wore, and then with a murmured, "Good-night, avourneen, may the poor boy's blessing lie light on your pillow this night," he manfully shouldered his basket and prepared to trudge towards the distant city, while Esther on her part, taking Aileen's hand, returned slowly and reluctantly to the old Red-house.

CHAPTER VI.

"Who is he, Esther?" asked Aileen, as they pursued their walk. "Who is he? And do you know what his name is? Do, dear Esther, tell me all about him?"

"Something I do know about him for sartain, Aileen, which is to say I know his father gets drunk with Dick at whiles, and then the mother is sure to come in at the end of the evening with her poor pale face and tattered rags, a cryin' and beseechin' of him to go home quiet, and to lave her summut of her own earnins, if so be as it were a few pence only for the buying of vittles for her young'uns."

"And does he, Esther?" asked Aileen, (much moved by this little glimpse into the life and sufferings of the poor), "does he go home with her? or what does he do if he doesn't?" she added, her quick eye catching the very decided shake of the head by which Esther negatived the previous question.

"Wot does he do?" repeated Esther. "He just knocks her down if he ain't too far gone to lift his hand against her, and 'case he is—why thin, poor soul, she has the best of it, for she never leaves him until wot with coaxing and soft words on her part, and cursing and blaspheming on his, she gets him clear out of the ale-house, and back to her miserable home again."

"Poor mother, how unhappy she must be," said Aileen, gently. "A drunken husband and starving children, how very, very unhappy she must be."

"Well, for unhappy, I don't rightly know," said Esther, doubtfully. "She never will own to being wot one calls real down-right unhappy, and when I tell her that she is, she always says

that God knows best, and that her children are good and she has much to be thankful for in regard to them; and that as to her husband, Jesus will change his heart p'raps some day when she least expects it; a thing as I don't in the least believe myself, for though I have heerd say as Jesus were a werry nice gentleman in his day, and did a sight of good besides, I don't believe he no more nor any other man could make black, white, or put a sober heart into Harry Darville's drunken body."

"Esther! Esther!" cried Aileen, in a tone of horror, "you shouldn't talk that way of Jesus! Don't you know that He is the Son of God, and God himself, and therefore we must never speak of Him as if he were a common creature like ourselves."

"I means no unrespect I'm sure, Aileen; but I've knowed scores of drunkards such as Harry, and I never knowed one that didn't come to a bad end yet, so I don't see how he is to escape it neither."

"Esther," said Aileen, forgetting Harry Darville as another idea occurred to her, "you must

be very very good in yourself to have known so many wicked people, and to keep good still."

"Good! good!" cried Esther impatiently, "haven't I telled you already, Aileen, that when you ain't at my side, I'm as bad as the rest of them. No, no, there is no goodness in me, it is only them innocent ways and words of yourn, birdie, that has learned me to mourn over many things that for all that, are a second sort of natur to me still."

"For all that, Esther, you must be good, quite in the inside of your heart, I mean, though the outside life may be wicked still."

"I b'leive you, child," cried Esther quickly, "I'm sure and sartain summutor other is always a crying out within me against the life I am forced to lead. But bless 'ee, dear, where's the use of that, when there's no one nigh at hand to learn me better; can you, Aileen?"

"I don't know," the child answered in a puzzled voice, "but I know you must be good and obedient, and charitable to every one."

But here Esther interrupted her by laughing wildly.

"And so that's your lesson is it, Aileen? God help you, child, wot with your innocence, and my lack of it, there ain't no great chance of my being teached my moralities too soon, I'm afeard. But ain't there nothing else now, that you would like for to learn me."

"We should be honest, Esther, and never do anything to anybody that we wouldn't like somebody to do to ourselves."

"That's a lesson that never was teached in the school I comes from," Esther gravely answered, and deceived by her mock solemnity Aileen went on:

"The catechism would tell you all the rest, dear Esther."

"Oh, it would, would it," Esther again interrupted her to say, with the same lurking mockery in her words and manner.

"But I haven't got mine here," Aileen went on rather hurriedly, for she was beginning to feel a little confused at the strange way in which Esther was accepting of her teaching. "And I am so sorry. But oh, dear Esther, one thing I must say, that is, that if you would but say some

short prayers every day, I am sure God would listen to you, and send some one or other to teach you to be good. I am quite sure he would, Esther, if you asked him."

"Will you learn me a prayer then, Aileen?" Esther turned suddenly round and asked her; "I should like to know the one you says every morning. It seems a very nice one."

"That is the 'Our Father,' Esther; Jesus taught it to us himself, because he loves us like a father, and he wants us to feel exactly towards him as if we were his children; and so indeed we ought, because we really are, only as papa used to tell me sometimes, we do not remember it always as we should do."

"Aye, aye," said Esther, "some of us are his children, surelie. No one can look upon you, Aileen, and not feel as if you must be precious in his sight, as the werry apple of his eyes; but if there do be a few as he has nourselled and houselled like, and kept from care and canker, there be's a many and many more, my lassie, as he seems to have set less store by—many and many," Esther repeated in her musing manner, "as he

has put out to nurse, as it were, in the gutter mud of the werry streets, with only sich wittles for their living as they can beg or steal—only sich beds for their sleeping in as old archways, or door steps can yield them—and can you tell me, Aileen, the reason of this difference, or why, if God is the Good-Father-God you talks of, he ain't the Good Father-God to all, both rich and poor alike?"

Poor Aileen—no wonder she felt puzzled now!

Unconsciously Esther had touched upon a subject which has troubled larger brains and saddened larger sympathies than she or the child could boast of. The doctrine of original sin, and of man's free will, and of final retribution for good and evil, which alone offers any reasonable explanation of the sorrow and suffering that stalk rampant through the world; of the oppression of the good, and of the triumph of the wicked, by which our faith is so often tried, and our sense of justice wounded; this doctrine which can never be put aside without plunging the soul into far greater difficulties than those from whence it is

seeking refuge, was of course as yet only floating dimly through Aileen's brain. She had indeed a certain vague idea on the subject but it was not sufficiently defined to be put into words, therefore, instinctively she fell back upon that childlike trust in the wise beneficence of the Almighty, which is the loveliest aspect faith ever puts on, in His regard, and the truest definition also of our own position and of his. Of ours as the creature children of his adoption; and of his as the Great Creator, or as Esther quaintly termed it, the Good-Father-God of all.

"I cannot tell you, Esther, why some people are happy and some are not, if that is what you want to know; but I remember when poor papa was dying, and I was crying very much, and mama too busy and too sad to attend to me, a great friend of ours, a very great friend indeed, Esther, took me on his knee and talked to me a great deal about this very thing, because I thought it so hard that papa should not get well when I was so longing for it, and he told me then, and I have often thought about it since, especially since I have been here, that we never

should know until the end of all, why God grants us or refuses our wishes."

"And then?" asked Esther anxiously.

"And then," replied Aileen, hesitating a little as she tried to recall the lessons of her teacher, "and then, when God judges all men, He will show us why He did this or that for us, and in this way, Mr. St. Clair said, perhaps we should come to find out that the very things we had disliked the most in this life, poverty, for instance, or sickness, had not only been sent us for our greater good, but that perhaps even, we never should have been saved without them."

"Well, I hopes so, I am sure," said Esther, coolly. "But this I must say, Aileen, it 'ill take a deal of teaching to make me believe suffering cold, and hunger, and want of all sorts can be for the good of any crittur wotsoever, either in this world or the next one."

"God loves the poor," was Aileen's soft reply. "He made His own son poor to show us how He loved them, and Mr. St. Clair told me, and indeed I knew it quite well before, that if they were patient in spite of suffering, and

honest in spite of poverty, that then in that case God would give them great graces to make them good in this life, and great rewards for having been so in the next."

"And suppose they haven't been learnt all this?" said Esther, with a groan, "suppose they haven't been learnt it? Oh! Aileen, Aileen, how was I to know when I was turned loose upon the London streets, famine struck, naked, houseless, a bit of a child not half higher nor yourself, how was I to know that riches was not a blessing and poverty not a curse? And above all the rest, how was I to know that the rich were not the born enemies of the poor, a taking all and leaving nothing, and for that werry reason lawful to be robbed, snared, set upon, and defrauded, whenever and wherever it warn't quite unpossible to do so."

"Indeed, it was quite impossible that you should have known better," replied Aileen, soothingly. "But it is not impossible to be sorry now that you do know, and try and do better for the future. And, Etty, darling, I remember so well papa's once telling me that he

thought every one had a chance at one time or another of becoming good. He said it might be only a good thought, or an accidental word that turned our minds to better things—our opportunity he used to call it—and that all the good or bad of our future lives might depend upon the way we used it. I cannot explain exactly, but I think I know what he meant, tho' I'm afraid I do not make it very plain to you."

The girl made no reply, and they walked on for some time in silence, but just as The Old Red House came into view she paused, and laying her hand on Aileen's shoulder, said in a tone of softened earnestness, very different from the bitter mockery of her previous manner:

"Aileen, I've been a thinking all this time that may happen there's sommit of truth in wot you says, and so perhaps (it seems queer enough to suppose it, Birdie), but perhaps you are my opportunity, and that if I don't take heed to what you say now, God, may be, will send me nobody arterwards to tell me more."

"Oh! Esther," cried Aileen, in some puzzle and distress at this appeal from one so much

older, and in all worldly matters so much wiser than herself, "Oh, Esther, I am such a very little girl! How I do wish God would send some one older and wiser than I am to teach you; and he will, too; I am sure he will, if you will only pray to Him every day to do so."

"You shall learn me how, Aileen," Esther answered, and softly unclosing the garden gate, and cautioning the child to silence she carried her once more up-stairs, and replaced her in her prison chamber.

CHAPTER VII.

ESTHER was as good as her word that night, and it was a touching thing to see the tall womanly looking girl so deep in the world's worst lore, and so roughened by its usage, taking with the docility of a child her first lesson in the sacred duty of prayer from the lips of the little girl beside her. The prayer which she sought to learn was a prayer intended for all men, and therefore while on account of its very simplicity most fitting to the innocent child who taught it, it took yet a fuller and deeper meaning on the lips of the sinner by whom it was repeated.

Never before had the word 'Father' as a

direct communication between her soul and its Creator passed the lips of Esther, and in giving it to him now for the first time in her torn and struggling life, she gave Him, with the strange unspeakable reverence which the name of the Father God inspires in all who are unaccustomed to its usage, just such a fund of fresh undefined affection, as a loving child often bestows unconsciously on the natural author of its existence. Each of the succeeding short petitions seemed to touch a new chord in the girl's untutored heart. Some of them, indeed, she could not entirely understand, though they gave her, perhaps for that very reason, a dim consciousness of dependence on a Superior Power, very soothing to her wearied spirit; but others on the contrary came home at once to all her conscious necessities of mind or body, and when, repeating the words after Aileen, she asked her "Father in Heaven" for that daily bread which, till then, she had never even dreamed of seeking, save by force or fraud—for the forgiveness of sins which had never before been cancelled, excepting on the tread-mill; for deliverance from evil, which she

had always hitherto considered as a necessary consequence of her position in society ; tears were in her eyes and in every tremulous inflection of her voice, and a deep, though as yet almost unconscious love took possession of her heart, never again to be driven from that stronghold. And that love was faith, though as yet a faith most vague and undefined. She loved, and therefore she believed in the beloved one, in His right to command, and His power to enforce. But this revelation of His existence included no precise revelation of her duties in His regard. *That* is only to be found in the church which He has appointed as His medium of communication with His creatures, and therefore it was that Esther loved, yet knew not as yet how to act upon that love—wept for her deep offences of the past, and yet in the midst of her very tears would probably offend Him still. But never again so deeply ! Conscience had been too thoroughly aroused for that, not quite an accurate conscience, perhaps ; but still a conscience that could accurately decide upon many points where it had hitherto been stifled by ignorance, or made dumb

by passion. Henceforward neither force nor persuasion would have power to induce her to take an active part in the deeper villainies of her companions, but she could not as yet (how could it be expected) entirely comprehend that she would be sinning almost as deeply as if she had done so, by conniving at them when accomplished by others.

When therefore Dick made his appearance at the Red-house that very night, and told her that Mr. Grey, not being satisfied of the safety of Aileen in her present abode, had insisted upon her being removed to one of their lowest tramp-houses in the city, though she besought him as if her very life were depending on his decision, to refuse compliance with this monstrous proposition, she yet never for a moment contemplated disobedience, and was forced in the end to content herself with his promise that the child should never be ill-treated, and that so far as he could prevent it, nothing should be done to pervert or degrade her.

“ Though it’s as much as my wages is worth to do so,” he added rather sulkily. “ For Mr.

Grey has set his heart it seems on her knowing them werry things which naturally, Hetty, you are so unwilling to learn her."

"Drat the man!" cried Esther, indignantly; "but he ain't no man surelie, but a reg'lar viper to concoct such a black piece of willany toward a innocent child. But you won't join him, Dick, I knows you won't. You has your faults to be sure, as who hasn't I wonder? but you ain't never a one to demean yourself by a plotting and plotting against a babby like that?"

"Well I ain't no more butter hearted than any other cove that I knows of," responded Dick; "but it does seem a ugly job it does, to try and smother such a lily as that in the slum of a trámp-house. Still I have a dooty to perform towards my employer, and I ain't never the man for to shirk a dooty. Mr. Grey says, says he, 'you do so and so, Dick, (no need to enter into further partic'lars just now, my gal) and I will give you so and so for a doing of it when it's done.' That's wot he says, and, in course it follows you see, that if I don't manage to finish the job, I ain't werry likely to touch the jingo."

"And those friends of hers that were to come down handsome when they seed as you'd pertected her from the wiles of that willin. In course, you've given up that spec, Dick?" said Esther, returning as a last resource to the idea which had so greatly tempted him the first time they discussed the subject of Aileen's detention together.

"Not a bit of it," cried Dick. "I've got a plan in my head, my gal, by which we shall be enabled to take shares in both coaches, and to butter our bread on both sides at once, a thing as is next to impossible to be done in this 'ere perfessun of our'n. But we'll do it this time, lass, we'll do it," he continued, rubbing his hands together with real professional gusto; "and won't it be prime, that's all?"

"You won't tho', if you have her many days at the tramp-house," said Esther dexterously humouring his projects to make him fall in with her own. "She is precious quick of hearing, is Aileen, and sure to pick up all sorts of bad things like winking, if she's kept there long."

"But she shan't be," cried Dick, "for I only

wants her there for a week or two just to throw dirt in the eyes of our principal, and ar'ter that, Hetty, we'll give her a spell in the country when we goes on our tramp."

"In a week or two! are you certain, Dick, that it won't be for longer?" Esther questioned doubtfully.

"Sartin sure; and for this reason chiefly, that the beaks have got their eyes upon some of us, and won't leave us long to ourselves if we venture to stay. That will be reason enough to give to our employer, and for the rest he need never know that the kinchen is under your partic'lar pertection, and that you never suffers nothing worser nor the air of summer to light upon her head."

"Ah!" said Esther, with a tenderness very beautiful in one like her, "it is a werry tender little head it is, and should be cared for accordin, Dick."

"And so it shall," said Dick, who was growing to feel extremely benevolent under the stimulous of a double gain in prospect. "So it shall be, wotever may happen to light upon

our'n. But our'n is made of harder stuff, and so, in course we needn't be no ways so partic'lar about them, need we, Hetty?"

"No ways so particlar, surelie not," said Esther, slowly, and with that feeling of indescribable sadness which always came over her now, when the sinful nature of her past life was put more distinctly than usual before her. "Being such as we bees, why should we? And yet, arter all, Dick, if the ways we are learned in are the ways that we goes in, perhaps I shouldn't have been so unlike to she if my schooling hadn't been different altogether?"

"That's just it," said Dick. "For do you know, Hetty, it's my firm belief that if you'd been learned in the same way that she was, you'd have been just as good an' innocent this werry moment as that ere little crittur as looks like a angel, if angels there be, and I like when I sees her to think that there are."

Tears rushed into Esther's eyes, and the strong throb of her heart had well nigh choked her! To think that by any possibility she could have been like that child, and that yet she was not.

"Oh, Dick, you are only joking," she sobbed out at last. "It is unpossible quite that I ever could have been like to she?"

"And why impossible, my darter," he replied in that tone of honest, rough affection, which was the spell that bound Esther so entirely to his service. "Kinchens (babbies I mean) are as like one another, as like as eggs, and if all are innocent at the out-set, in course the only difference between 'em arterwards must be, that the ones have been kept so, and the t'others warn't. And you were of the last, my gal, and bad enough may be when first I found you, tho' for all that, it touches my heart at times to think that wotever you were, I have made you worser."

"It's no fault of yours, for all that, Dick," replied Esther, touched by the remorse which his words implied. "You couldn't have teached me better, because you knowed no better yourself, while there was many a one to learn me worser, so that if you'd never set eyes on me I still must have growed to be wot I am."

"Well, my gal, never say die about it!" cried

Dick cheerily. "Whatever you are you're good enough for my books, and too good may be, so cut off at once and get the young 'un ready for a start. It is only for a couple of weeks at the outside," he added, catching a glimpse of Esther's reluctant face, "and then we'll get her into the country among the birds and flowers, that look all as one to my mind, as brothers and sisters to such as she."

"Don't they tho'," cried Esther, pausing with her foot on the first step of the ladder. "I never look at she without thinking of the wild roses just as we see 'em after leaving Lonnon, so fair and slight on the rough stem that bears 'em, with may be the new cut hay smelling sweetly around. Ah, me! the thorny briar ain't a more ungainly keeper for the pretty blossom than such as we are for that blessed little child up stairs."

"Go along with you," cried Dick good-naturedly, "and don't be making such disparaging remarks on present company, yourself in partic'lar, as is worth the whole lot of us put together."

Long ere he had brought this consolatory remark to a conclusion, however, Esther was standing by Aileen's pillow, her face as pale as death, and her dark eyes looking darker and more stormy than ever in the conflicting passions of the hour. A ray of moonlight was falling softly over the sleeping child, touching her hair with a golden glory, while the wild rose hue it revealed upon her cheek gave her more than ever the look of the delicate flower to which she was associated in the fancy of her companions. Esther looked until she could have wrung her hands in anguish, while murmuring beneath her breath :

" To be forced to part with her just when she has learned to nestle like a frightened bird upon Esther's bosom. To be forced to let her go, and to have to keep smiling and smiling all the time, as if it were only a May day pleasureing she was sent on. A smiling and a smiling while the heart is breaking, just to prevent her a breaking hers as well, for I'm werry doubtful, I am, but wot she will cry like nothing at all when she finds she ain't to have Esther with her. Well,

well, best done soonest done, so here goes to wake her. "Why, Aileen! Aileen!" she cried in as cheery a voice as she could muster at the moment. "Wake up, my precious! Here's the moon a dancing and flutterin' in at the window, as if to invite you to make merry in its twinkling. Up, up, and let me dress you for a journey."

"A journey?" cried Aileen, starting joyously. "Oh! Esther, can it be true? Am I going to mamma?"

"Not just yet, my butterfly," replied Esther, trying to look and speak as if such a thing were by no means beyond the bounds of possibility in the future. "But Dick he has come back, and he is going away agin (worse luck) in a couple of hours, and--" but here she fairly broke down. She could not get out the words she was come to say; they well nigh choked her.

"Going away again. So much the better," said Aileen, with an air of inexpressible relief. "Oh, Etty, I do so wish he would go away again for good, and never, never come back to plague us."

"But, my darling!" Esther now fairly at her wits' end blurted forth abruptly, "it is a deal worser nor that, it is, for he has just been a telling me he wants you for to go away along with he."

But here Esther broke down again, for with a fearful cry Aileen leaped suddenly out of bed, and flung herself on her breast, exclaiming:

"Oh! you won't, Esther, you won't!" and the poor child clung as tightly to her protectress as if Dick were in bodily presence there, and tearing her by main force away. "You won't let me go alone with that dark, rough man; you won't let him take me! Oh! Esther, say that you won't!—you won't!"

"And do you think, birdie," replied Esther in a low sad voice, "that I would, if it wern't unpossible quite to help it? There now, don't you cry so, my pretty lamb, don't now, for I can't a bear to see it."

"Oh! I must, I must!" Aileen passionately responded, burying her head at the same time in Esther's bosom, and showing by that very action how helplessly she depended on her, even at the

móment when compelled by appearances to suspect her intentions. “ You to desert me, Esther! You that say you love me, and that I was beginning to love so well!”

“ But wot can I do ?” said Esther, with a mixture of perplexity and impatience in her manner. “ Why, Heaven help your wits, child, I’m quite as much in Dick’s power as you are.”

“ You are not!—you are not!” sobbed Aileen. “ *You* can get out, *you* can call, *you* can shout for assistance! Oh! if I were you, Esther, I would run to the top of yonder hill, and I would shout until all the town could hear me, that there were thieves and robbers in this bad, cruel house!”

“ Aileen, I carn’t,” cried Esther violently, and seizing the two small hands that were round her neck, she grasped them so tightly in her agitation that the child uttered perforce a low cry of pain, while she went on wildly:

“ Oh! child, child! don’t you know, or havn’t I already telled you, that to bring the eyes of others upon this house would be all as one as to send Dick to prison—to the gallows, may be—

over the seas at all events, miles an' miles away to furren parts, a disgraced and lonely man, with no one near to say, that for all his crimes an' for all his evil doings, his poor Hetty was a loving of him still, and would be a loving of him to the werry last."

"But how can you, Esther, how can you love him?" pouted Aileen, "and he so bad and cruel to your own Aileen."

"How can I?—how can I?" repeated Esther pettishly. "How can I love the only human crittur as has ever showed love or kindness to me? Havn't I telled you, Aileen, how he'd a good word for me when all the world and his wife was a hooting and a gibing of me—me, a miserable, starving child, a hooting of me on to prison? Or how he searched for me again out of the dark and dreary jail, and took me with him to this old house, which, cruel and bad as you rightly calls it, was still the only home that he had to give me. Haven't I telled you too, how his own coat has been often my only shelter from the howling storm, or how often and often he has hushed me to rest, until forgetting

altogether I was a orphan child, I slept happy and peaceable on his bosom? Havn't I telled you all this already, Aileen, and carn't you see that bad as he's been to others, he has been goodness itself to me, and that I should have a heart blacker nor midnight if I could peach upon him?"

Aileen only answered by her hopeless weeping, and Esther after a moment's pause went on:

"I cannot and I will not, and if I knows anything of you, Aileen, you ain't the gal to ask me."

Esther had judged correctly, and Aileen entreated her no more. She was far too young to be able to discriminate or decide upon the right and wrong of the case as the other put it, but something within her seemed to say, it could be no good deed to set treachery between hearts so loving and beloved, and above all so apparently dependent on each other.

Quietly, therefore, she withdrew her arms from Esther's neck—quietly and gently too, and then laying her head once more on her deserted pillow, wept there in silence. There was

something inexpressibly touching in the action. It was as if she had lost all hope in the other's care, and yet would not, could not blame her for refusing to befriend her further. The heart of Esther smote her,—no words, no passion, no cry of sorrow could have moved her as did that silent, soundless weeping.

She drew Aileen once more to her arms, and while her own tears fell like the large drops of a thunder shower upon that innocent head, sobbed out:

"Don't you turn that a way from me, Aileen, don't, my darling, don't; but listen while I tells you that though I mustn't go with you now, I'll never desert you, never. No, my dearie, dearie," she continued hugging Aileen convulsively in her arms, "for wheresoever you are, or however lonely you seems to yourself to be, yes, even though you don't see nothing of me, believe me, for you may, I'll not be really far off, and Hetty's eye will be on you still, and Hetty's heart a caring for you ever."

"And hearken to me again," she resumed after a moment's pause for thought and breathing;

"Yes, that's right," she went on cheerfully, as Aileen resolutely dried her eyes, and struck by her earnest manner fixed her blue eyes on her, "that's right, dry your eyes and listen, for they are grave words I am a going to speak, and such as I wouldn't throw lightly to a child like you. You are going among bad people, Aileen; among them as curse, and swear, and thieve, and drink, you are a going now; but never let any of them make you do as they do, not for coaxing, not for beating; but no indeed I'm sure they'll not hurt you," she added, feeling the shudder which the bare word had sent through Aileen's frame, "they'll not hurt you, lambie, yet if worser comes to worst, don't, if they kill you for it, say or do a dishonest thing to please 'em."

"I will not, indeed I will not," replied Aileen, hushed into grave resolve by the earnest solemnity of Esther's manner.

"And never you drink, Aileen, oh, my darling, darling, above every other blessed thing, as you love the friends who've lost you, as you hope to meet them again without a stain on your life, such as time and tears will never wash out,

"never you drink, Aileen. No doubt they will try to make you, but never let them persuade you to touch a drop of beer, or wine, or spirits of any kind, so long as you are with them 'ere divils, and Esther not at your side,"

"I promise," said the child, "and then unable even in the midst of her sorrows to forbear smiling at the strange idea, added quickly,—
"But Esther, why do you talk that way? I never could you know. Surely it is impossible! I never could get drunk."

Much to her surprise, however, instead of joining in her mirth, Esther gravely answered:

"No one knows as hasn't tried, Aileen. But here now, just wrap this old shawl round you and make no noise, and I'll show you wot it is to be a drunkard, and why I warns you so much against it."

Aileen did as she was desired, and then Esther carried her down stairs and across a grass-grown court to a part of the building where she had never been before. We have already hinted that the Red-house was an inn in the worst sense of the word, that is to say, that under cover of the

external sign, it was the resort of half the bad characters of London, independently of the particular gang who were its ordinary inhabitants. Esther was, of course, therefore already quite aware that one of the rooms looking out upon the court to which she had brought Aileen, was occupied that very evening by a party of successful pick-pockets, and that their carouse was just drawing to a close. Quietly unclosing the shutters, which opened on the outside of the building, she first looked in herself to make sure that nothing too unseemly should meet the innocent eyes she brought to gaze upon the scene, and then lifting up the child to the level of the casement bade her look in, and learn of her own experience what thing a drunkard was, and what (she did not certainly use the words, but her own had much the same meaning in them) was the drunkard's Heaven. And Aileen did look in and learn—learn what the drunkard is, in all the various phases of his career, from senseless, idiot mirth to hopeless, helpless stupor and prostration; and sick at heart at the spectacle before her, she hid her

face once more in Esther's bosom while she whispered :

"And am I going then to live always with men like these?"

"No, no," said Esther; "but men like these you will often meet, and women I'm afraid as well. And there may be (I'll not deny it) bad spirits and black hearts among them who, for their own brutal funning will try to make you do as they do, and who will think it rare sport to set a babby like you a reeling drunk in liquor. They may try, Aileen, but remember no one can make you unless you chooses."

"They shall kill me first," said Aileen, in a tone that left little doubt as to the strength of her present resolution.

"'Twould be better far, believe me, child," said Esther. "But there'll be no need, my precious! For Dick, he ain't quite so bad, you see, as you thought him, Dick has promised me that you shan't be forced to do nothing but wot you chooses, and Dick's word is as good as an oath, it is. So if you'll only be good and patient just for a week or two, Aileen, we two will have

a spell together in the fresh sweet country afterwards, and we'll gather butter-cups and run after butterflies, and be as happy as the day is long. But see now, if there isn't Dick a calling to us already, and you not dressed to go with him yet."

CHAPTER VIII.

WE trust our readers have not entirely forgotten the poor boy whom Esther accosted on the common, and whom it now becomes our duty to accompany in spirit on his route towards London. A long and weary walk he had before him, ere he could reach Gray's Buildings, and the wretched lodging house in that wretched place which he called his home. The door was still on the latch when at last he paused before it, they who abode within being not very particular as to hours, and closing it gently behind him as he entered, Jim prepared very leisurely to ascend the staircase—very leisurely, poor boy, for he was hungry

and weary both, and there was nothing in the tale which he had to tell, or in the home to which he was coming, to give lightness to his footsteps, or the energy of gladness to exhausted nature. So up the dark stairs he slowly went, the dark and creaking stairs, teeming with every nauseous odour that dirt and poverty and disease—the crowding of many living creatures into close and unventilated chambers—the steam of coarse food and garbage unremoved—of tobacco smoke and gin combined, could inflict upon the senses.

All these things, however, had long since become as a second nature to him, and regardless of the noxious atmosphere, he went on, looking, indeed, wistfully towards one or two half opened doors, from whence light and sounds of revelry were proceeding, but still passing steadily by them and beyond them, until he had gained the last and highest of the many landing places which that old house could boast of. There again he paused, either to recover breath, or which was yet more likely, (judging from the disturbed and uncertain expression of his face,) from a lurking unwillingness to enter. Some

one appeared to be awake within, for a ray of light came streaming beneath the doorway, and there was an occasional click, click besides, as of a woman using scissors, but other sound of life there was not, and save for that little candle's gleam outside, and that occasional tap within, all was so silent and so still, you might have deemed the room had either no inhabitants at all, or was only inhabited by the dead. Jim, however, knew as well as though the door were open, all that was going on in that silent chamber, and the exact way in which every member of his family, whether absent or present, was occupied at that moment. He knew that his brothers and sisters were all asleep, if hunger had not kept them waking; that his father was at the ale house; and his patient, half starved mother bending over the work that was to buy food for her children on the morrow, with none to witness the enduring toil to which her mother's love had urged her, save He who has placed that mother's love, ever in the self-sacrificing heart of woman.

Softly at last he unclosed the door, to see, as he had expected, in one corner a group of

children, coiled for the sake of warmth one upon another like a cluster of serpents, beneath the tattered coverlet of the only bedstead that the room could boast of; and in the other, with the dim light of the farthing dip, by which she was straining her eyes to work, full upon her person, the poor pale mother of the sleepers, bending wearily over the boot she was endeavouring to finish for the morning's market. Her back was towards the door, so she was not aware of his having entered, until he had reached the settle and rested his head upon the table in an attitude of despondency not to be mistaken.

"Ah, Jim, darlint, and is it you?" she cried, more joyfully than the circumstances at first sight might have seemed to warrant. "It's myself has been wae about you this night ma bouch al, for I was afeard the ould fit was on you, and that you war off agin."

"No, mother, I'll niver lave you agin, plaize God, barring only—"

"Barring what, acushla?" the mother anxiously demanded, seeing that he paused.

"Barring the fit do be on me suddint like,

and then, to spake God's truth, I can't well help myself from going, mother," the boy replied, with something of the sad, wavering look which had greeted Esther on the hill.

"Plaize God it won't though," the woman answered hastily as she caught the uncertain glance, "He'll lave you to be the joy and comfort of your poor mother, as you ever war, before that weary faver tuck you, and as you'll be agin, glory be to God, I doubt not, when your spirits do get stronger! And where war you to-night, my son, that you didn't come home till now?"

"On the hill side, mother, a gathering chickweed to help out little Lizzy wid her marketing to-morrow, and I've brought you a posy too; see here, mother, daisies and bootercups the first of the sayson," and as he spoke Jim placed the little bouquet of early flowers which he had gathered in his rambles, upon his mother's lap.

"God help you, child," said the poor woman smiling, "but it's mad entirely afther the posies that you are. Shure it's a gardener you should have been, my boy, and living in the fresh, sweet country air that you love so well, far away

from the dust and smoke of this weary city. But Jim dear," she added in a voice tremulous with anxiety. "You went to Mr. Hardman as I towld you, and what answer did he give you, mavourneen?"

"Yerra! but I'd almost forgotten," cried Jim, "but I mind now, mother," he continued, seeing her look of irrepressible anxiety, "I seen Mister Hardman his own self, and he gave me just this for you, for the two pairs we done yesterday."

"One, two, tree," the mother nervously counted the little heap of copper which he had poured into her lap; "ah, then sure it's joking you are, Jim, why I never tuck less before nor two pence the pair, since I worked for the trade, and he can't have cut off the odd ha'pence, come give it to me, avourneen, and say you war only joking."

"I warn't a joking, mother," Jim desperately responded; "he has cut off the odd ha'pence, and he says if so be as you don't like to work on his terrems, he knows plenty of others that will, and say thank ye kindly for the job likewise."

"God help us then," replied the poor woman, disconsolately, "for work as hard as I will, and if I worked my fingers to the bone, moreover, I couldn't betune light and dark do more nor three pairs in the twenty-four hours of the night and day; and how I'm to buy needles and thread out of such airnings as those, and light to work by, and bread to feed you wid, it is far beyant my poor wits or invintion to disarn."

Poor Mrs. Darville! this hurried enumeration of all her difficulties, brought them so vividly before her mind's eye, that unable to bear up against the prospect she burst into a fit of tears, the first she had indulged in during many a weary day and night of anxious thoughts and failing hopes, and ever recurring, and ill requited labour. The boy's arms were round his mother's neck in an instant.

"Whist, whist, mother, will you whist now," he whispered, for mindful of the sleeping children the whole of this conversation had been carried on in an undertone. "Yerra, it's ashamed of you I am, to be breaking your heart that way, and me to the fore to help you, ready and willing,

God knows, in spite of the faver, to work harder nor ever a poor boy worked before, sooner nor you and the rest on 'em should come to starving,—an' see, too, here's a penny, I forgot, a penny that was give to me by a poor girleen on the hill, and I not askin' nor thiknin' of askin' her at all at all, but just for luck like, and to show us God will niver desart us, if we don't give Him good rayson for it; an' afther all, why would He, mother? shure He niver done it yet, and it 'ud be a quare thing wouldn't it, if He war to do it now, whin we are less able nor ever to get on widout Him."

"Thru for you, honey, and troth it's the good boy you are to be mindin' me of it now," replied his mother drying her eyes, and feeling infinite relief from this short outburst of her hidden sorrow. "So now we'll just make up our minds to take things as they come, and trust to God and his goodness for not lavin' the childhre to starve entirely."

"You've just hot it now, mother," Jim cheerfully responded, "so go and lie down a bit, will you, for it's reglarly done up wid work and

worry you are, and I'll stitch on at the bootie till the candle has burnt a bit lower in the socket."

Mrs. Darville's objections to this plan, on the ground that Jim must be even more worn out and weary than herself, were interrupted by a roar from her youngest born, who, waking suddenly from a hunger troubled sleep, and seeing his brother sitting there without the food which it was usually his task to bring, burst into a terrific cry for bread, and obstinately refused the less substantial comfort which his unhappy mother proffered in the shape of kisses and caresses. Two or three other voices soon chimed in to swell the chorus, while the elder children sat up in bed and glared upon him with a look of eagerness on their sharpened features, that could admit but of one interpretation only—it was the eagerness, the animal eagerness, of hunger.

"They're starvin', they are; that's the raal fact of the matther, poor darlints," said the unhappy woman, as she walked her refractory babe up and down the dim lighted garret, in a vain attempt to soothe him. "You warn't agone,

not tin minutes, acushla, when fader came in mad for the dhrink, and tuck off every farden I had to the ale house. It warn't over much, to be sure, but still it would have filled the cray-thur's bellies for them, and left us at pace this wanst, instead of the roaring and crying that's been in my hearing all day."

"He did, did he?" Jim asked, his blue, wandering eyes fairly flashing unaccustomed fire; "the dhrunken ould sot!"

"Whisht, Jim, whisht!" cried his mother, "don't be calling him bad names, acushla. Shure isn't he the fader afther all?"

"Troth is he," the boy answered in the bitterness of his soul, "and a quare sort of fader too, to lave wife and children and all a starvin', while he's purshuin' his drunkin' divarsions in the pot house—"

He would have said yet more, in spite of his mother's imploring looks, for his blood was fairly up, but just as he reached the ill-omened word last recorded on our pages, the door of the garret was pushed hesitatingly open, and the subject of his indignation entered. Harry Dar-

ville had once boasted a tall and stately person, but gin had done for him what gin will do for all that tempt its fatal waters, and now his features were bloated and drink sodden, his eyes blood shot and wild; his clothes (he had pawned all the decent apparel that he or any of his family had been possessed of) his clothes hung in miserable rags, loose and disconsolate, from his shrunken limbs, and his whole frame shook so violently in the nervous tremour produced by the absence of his accustomed amount of stimulants, that he had to lean for a moment against the door post before he could steady himself sufficiently to advance into the room. A drunkard he stood confessed, and as he rolled his eyes with their half maniac, half idiot, but wholly animal expression from the floor to the ceiling, and from the ceiling back again to the floor, it was but too evident that he was searching every corner of the miserable, dismantled garret for some forgotten piece of furniture which could be converted into drink. His wife had instinctively pocketed her work the instant she heard his foot upon the staircase, and Jim had shoved the table

on one side, so that nothing at first met his eyes save the curly heads of his frightened children, and the miserable shrinking form of their unhappy mother. Neither the one nor the other, however, were safe from his unholy speculations, and he was glaring from the patched quilt which barely covered the children to the tattered gown which formed the only attire of the mother, as if hesitating which to choose for the gratification of his drunken purpose, when Mrs. Darville, anxious to ward off the impending evil, timidly approached and besought him to lay down.

She was answered as might have been expected by a torrent of imprecations and reproaches, mingled with frenzied demands for money. In vain the wretched woman sought to quiet him.

“Money, money!” still he cried; “something to dhrive the devil out of me—something to prevent me going mad altogether! Nelly! Nelly! sorra sup I’ve had to-day, barrin’ the two pen’orth I tuck from you this mornin, and it’s going mad for the want of it I am. Curse you, woman! give it to me at wanst, if you wouldn’t

have me suck the life blood out of one of them childhre before your face for the drouth that is killin' me entirely."

And so he went on roaring, raving, and blaspheming, his wife all the while entreating him to be quiet, and his children creeping closer and closer to each other in momentary expectation of the scuffle which was sure to terminate the scene, when catching a glimpse of the money as it still lay upon the table, with the spring of a wild beast he pounced upon it.

"One! two! tree!" he muttered, counting it greedily over with his eager, palsied fingers. "That 'll do, that 'll do, that 'll drive away the divil that's roaring widin me. Oh! woman! woman!" he cried, holding up his clenched hand and shaking it in triumph at his wretched wife, "how dur you say you had no more money this mornin? See if I don't serve you out some day for the thricks and malice that keep them black divils in me, by denying me of my lawful money."

A drunken laugh followed this speech, and the children knew that their chance of supper

was over for the night. They were in too great awe, however, of their father to complain, and he would have pocketed the money without opposition, if the mother, all unused as she was to dispute his wishes, had not grown suddenly bold in the wants of her little ones, and sprang between him and the door, exclaiming:

“ Harry ! Harry ! I declare before my God they haven’t had bit or sup this blessed day. Oh ! lave it to thim, acushla, for the sake of the great God in Heaven and His Holy Mother, lave it to thim. On my knees I ask it. Shure arn’t they yer own flesh and blood, and amn’t I yer lawful wife ? and ye wouldn’t starve us intirely would ye ? Wirra ! wirra ! that I should live to see the day ; Harry, Harry, the curse of the wife and childhre too will one day light upon yer head if you pershist in yer evil courses ! ”

Even as she was speaking Mrs. Darville flung herself upon her knees before him, and seizing the hand that held the money, endeavoured to wrench it from his grasp. But the eye of the drunkard was now glittering like that of a maniac, and dealing with the hand that yet re-

mained disengaged, a blow on his wife's temples that laid her prostrate, he shook off Jim, who had flown to his mother's rescue, as if he had been an infant, and waving the money with a drunken shout of triumph above his head, made his escape to the public house where the greater part of his life was wasted.

Then it was that relieved from the terror of his immediate presence, the starving children he had left behind burst into a dismal chorus of howling and lamenting, in the midst of which Jim thought he could discern the low heart-broken wailing of his mother. The room was in pitchy darkness, for both table and candle had been knocked down in the struggle, but from the distant corner to which his father's hand had flung him, Jim tried to quiet the screaming children.

"Whist! whist!" he cried, "will ye whist now ye unfortunate little craytures. Don't you see that mother's down, and I can't find her for yer screechin'. Hould your tongues now, will you, until I can get at her."

This appeal was not made in vain, and guided

by her sobs, which seemed to come from a great distance, they were so stifled and suppressed, Jim at last succeeded in groping his way to Mrs. Darville, as she half-lay, half-sat on the floor, just where she had been felled by her brutal husband, and putting his arms affectionately round her neck, the boy sat down beside her. It was more than her full heart could bear, and she sobbed so convulsively, tho' still in silence, that Jim at last got frightened.

"Is it hurt you are, mother dear?" he anxiously enquired. "Och! spake to me will you, and don't be mournin' that sorrowful way. Is it yer head he's hot, or what is it? Won't you tell your own bouchaleen, that would give his life's blood for you, he would, and be glad of the chance moreover."

"Yes, Jim, shure enough he's hot me sore," sobbed the poor woman laying her swelled brow upon the shoulder of her faithful boy. "But och, darlint, it isn't that, it isn't that, it's the heart that's bruck entirely widin me. For years and years, Jim, ever since you war borne, avourneen, to be a help and comfort to yer unhappy mother,

I've shtugged an' shtugged, God is my witness if I haven't worked my fingers to the bone, both night and day, for to bring you up honest, and keep you dacent, but ever and always he's been the hindrance and the blight on all I done for yez. The hindrance and the blight, the curse and the destroyer of his own flesh and blood he has been, and wirra wirra to the day that any of yez war born if ever you tread in the steps of your poor sinful fader."

"But shure we won't mother, dear, and so where's the use of frettin' before hand," Jim was just beginning when he was interrupted by a loud knocking at the door, and a stentorian voice exclaiming:

"Why, missus, missus, wot's the row I wonder. You be'ant having a game at nothing at all in the dark be you now, for I'm blessed if there wasn't noise enough for twenty, five minutes agone as I was coming up your d— ill-conwenient stair-case, where there's not light enough to perwent a feller a breaking his nose on the brightest day that ever lit up St. Paul's."

It was the voice of Dick Daredevil, and Jim

knew it well ; but before he had time to reply, the other had very unceremoniously pushed open the door, and introduced himself and his companion into the apartment. The latter, neither Jim nor his mother had ever beheld before, but he seemed a dark looking, ill-favored individual, even in the imperfect glance they caught by the dim moonlight that was streaming already through the shutterless window.

“ It’s the table was upset, and the candle it went along wid it,” Jim explained in rather a sulky manner, for he was not only vexed at the intrusion, but pre-occupied in searching for the candle, which had, as well as the table, been hurled into some unknown corner of the room.

“ So I should say, hindeed,” the other responded coolly. “ Well, fetch up the glim my man, and I’ll set it alight with the end of my cigar, which you must know, I only indulges in because to-backer is rekisite to my constitootion. There now,” he continued as the operation of finding and lighting the candle was fairly concluded, “ It’s all right now, my tulip, so hold high for a

moment, will you, and let us have a squint at the pre-mises."

Jim, however, showing no great willingness thus to pander to his curiosity, the other snatched the candle from him, and commenced flaring it backwards and forwards in such a way that every portion of the garret was soon laid bare to his inspection. Very wretched it must have looked at any time, and with any amount of the broadest daylight to make it brighter; but doubly desolate it now appeared beneath the thick flames of that swealing candle, dimly revealing the upset table and broken chair—the children crouching beneath their tattered coverlet, and Mrs. Darville herself with her tear-stained swollen visage, feebly drawing her rags around her, and trying to look as if nothing beyond an ordinary accident (such as might have occurred in any household) had caused its present appearance of discomfort in her abode—a very futile attempt indeed where such practised eyes as Dick's and his companion's were brought to bear up on the subject.

"Well now," Dick went on as soon as he had

concluded his survey by flashing the light so close to Mrs. Darville's forehead, bleeding and discolored as it was from her husband's blow, that she drew back in involuntary trepidation, "I shouldn't at all wonder if you'd been having a row with the old'un. You've been a nagging of him, havn't you tho'? and he's taken out the worth of your breath in beating?"

"Troth, then, Mister Dick," she retorted bitterly, "I do wonder I do, at your havin' the face to ask the question. Sure whatever Harry does be doin' for good or bad, it must be a stale story to you by this time; and if he has robbed me of the last farden I had in the place, to dhrink it at the public, it's not to the papers *you* need go for to larn all about it."

"I'm blessed, however, if I ever heard a whisper about it before this werry minute," replied Dick. "Dear, dear, to think of that now, and that I should have been so fortunate as to step in just as these 'ere precious little innocents were a crying for their vittles. Come dry your eyes, my babe in the wood," he added, turning to Jim, "what's done is done, and carn't be helped,

so it ain't no manner of use to snivel no more about it."

"I warn't a crying, and you know very well that I warn't, Mister Dick," Jim angrily responded; but, notwithstanding this denial, Dick's comrade, who had hitherto kept a profound silence, chose to adopt the same idea, and to continue the unwelcome theme in a tone of mockery, which, without the seasoning of the other's good natured looking face to soften its effects, proved yet more irritating to its object.

"No, was he tho'—crying for his vittles, was he? Poor little gentleman, he must have been sore hungered I should say, judging from his looks before he would have demeaned himself by such an unmanly proceeding as that now."

"I warn't a crying," Jim doggedly replied. "And if I had been crying (which I warn't) but if I had been crying it wouldn't have been for supper, it would have been," he continued, warming into indignation as he proceeded "because it's all along of yer, and such as yer, that fader is for ever at the public—and mother a baten, heart-bruck woman—and the childhre so

entirely widout food, or clothes, or fire that little choice is left us now (God help us) between the work-house and the grave."

"Why don't you try the theayter, my man?" said Dick, eyeing him with just that sort of mock-admiration which it is so difficult to endure when one is thoroughly in earnest. "You'd make a first-rate stager you would. But arter all now," he continued, changing his tone into one of solemn reproach, "ain't you a werry ungrateful young dog—a werry ungrateful young dog indeed, to meet me and my chum in this game cock fashion, when we stept in for no other purpose in life then to offer you a genteel situation at three bob the week."

Jim's eyes sparkled brightly for a moment, but as they met his mother's, the doubt and distrust which he saw there expressed became instantly reflected in his own.

"Premium ain't over high, to be sure," Dick went on, seeing their hesitation, though totally mistaking its cause. "But the situation is decidedly first rate genteel and easy, needing nothing more nor good lungs and a strong voice

to make it answer to perfection. And let me tell you it's not every day in the week you'll get such a offer, or find a party like me and my chum here to change your notes into gold, since, however sweet they may be, they ain't of the sort usually sent into the market for to be coined into jingo."

"And sure that's nothin' but God's blessed truth, if it war the devil himself that said it," observed Jim, looking wistfully at his mother.

"True for you," she timidly, yet steadily replied. "Mister Dick, I'm sure there's no need to tell you, at this time of day, that Jim is a hard working, slaving gorsoon for his years as you'd find in London, and that there's nothing in the way of work he wouldn't be ready and willing to put his hand to, so be only that it was likewise honest."

"Honest!" laughed Dick, repeating her words with many pantomimic gestures, expressive at once of astonishment and amusement. "Honest! well I never! As if anything as John Nightshade had in hand *could* be dishonest. If it had been only I now, I wouldn't have been so much

surprised, for I do own to not being always so partic'lar as may be I'd ought to. But John, honest John, as they calls him in the city, why Lor' blessee, marm, your lad's as safe with he as with the Lord Mayor hisself, a office as John will some day be called to accommodate, if ever honest folks gets their own, a thing as doesn't too often happen, I'm afeard, in this low minded, unconscientious world we lives in."

Dick concluded this oration by pushing the individual, on whose moralities he was so vehemently insisting, into the middle of the room, and as the latter was brought by this movement more immediately into the light of the candle, Mrs. Darville could not help thinking, notwithstanding all assurances to the contrary, that a more thoroughly hang-dog, ill-looking animal she had never before set eyes on. Even his voice to her prejudiced ear had a twang of suppressed villainy about it, as he endeavoured to strengthen the effect of Dick's eloquence, by exclaiming in as thorough a tone of injured innocence as he could conveniently accomplish on the instant,

" Honest, indeed! Heaven grant you pardon, marm, for only venturing to insinuate that John Nightshade could either say or do anything dishonest or unginteel."

" Adding to which," continued Dick, " though the lad will have certainly a woice in the business, (a thing as considering the cause why we hires him couldn't be altogether perwented,) still he'll have nothing to say to the chaffing of customers, where the cheating (if cheating there is, which I flatly denies) where the cheating, if any, would lay."

" The case is just this," said John, shortly and gruffly; " Dick and me have entered into the root selling line, and we are looking out for a boy to cry 'em. We can't do it ourselves, because Dick never will be without that cursed cigar in his mouth, and I am troubled with a hoarseness, and rayther short winded besides."

The latter part of this statement was fully borne out by the canting, croaking voice in which it was delivered, but still the poor woman hesitated. Hesitated, no wonder! to throw her good and honest boy for any purpose, however

honest, into the hands of such men as these. Dick she long had known as one of her husband's boon companions, not so much a sot, but a greater villain far, and a jolly-faced, good-natured villain too, which made his companionship all the more to be dreaded for a boy. Dick being what he was, it followed almost as a matter of course that John, however strongly he might insist upon his own virtue, could hardly deserve to be classed among the more respectable portion of the costermongering community, to which both he and Dick Daredevil belonged. Nevertheless, there was nothing really suspicious in their present occupation, and to cap this argument by another, she and her children were starving and there was half-a-crown to be gained by the engagement.

Alas! how hard are the trials of the poor, and how different should be the measure with which we judge their temptations and our own; theirs so often the consequence of dire necessity, ours almost as often the offsets of mere idleness and ease. Had the present question been one really of right and wrong, Mrs. Darville would

have had no difficulty in deciding, but it seemed in fact to be rather a case of prudence than of virtue; a doubt as to the propriety of mating the boy with such ominous companions at all, than as to the actual honesty of the calling to which they had invited him.

Dick saw her hesitation, and guessing its cause, threw a shilling on the table to hasten the decision.

"There, old mother," he exclaimed in his most conciliatory manner, for he really was anxious to do what he thought a good turn by the starving family; "what are you afeard on? See, there's the 'listing money, and so let it be a bargain."

"A bargain, a bargain!" cried Jim eagerly. "Oh, mother, won't you let it be a bargain? Shure it isn't in me to be dishonest, but if it war, wouldn't it be less a temptation to be cryin' roots in the sthreets than to be lookin' in at them aiting house windows full of vittles, and never a penny, nor the ghost of a penny, in a boy's pocket to buy 'em."

Mrs. Darville glanced fearfully at her son.

For the first time in her life the idea struck her that he might be some day tempted in his desperation to do a dishonest deed ; the bare suggestion of such a possibility went through her like a knife ; and catching the boy by both his hands she exclaimed :

“ Jim, dear, sure you wouldn’t. Tell me, darlint, that you wouldn’t, just to make me aisy in my mind about you ; tell yer poor old mammy that neither could nor starvation will ever tempt you to steal.”

“ Troth, mother, I do hope, with the help of God, they won’t, but still I can’t take upon me to say I never should be timpted. Any ways, this here job is honest, and we are starvin’, every mother’s son of us, and I couldn’t answer for myself, I couldn’t, mother,” the boy added, after struggling with something that seemed to choke him, “ if you hinder me from such a chance as this is.”

Poor mother ! what could she say or do against such an argument as this ? The eager, wolf-like glance of Lizzy, too, as she sat up in her wretched bed, and glared upon the shilling which

was still laying on the table just where Dick had thrown it, caught her eye at the same moment, and bursting into tears she answered sadly:

"Well, acushla, sure it must be as you wish; may the Lord forgive me for that same word if it's putting your precious sowl into jeopardy it is. God He knows that if it warn't for them poor childhre yonder, I'd as lief, and liefer starve outright myself, nor see you consortin' at all wid the fader's friends."

"There, now, keep a civil tongue in your head, carn't you, old lady," interrupted Dick, whose quick eye had detected a gathering storm on his companion's brow. "Don't you know as the devil is never so black as he's painted, and so you'll be saying next week, when this'ere cove comes back to you with a pocket full of tin, and a heart as lamb-like as if he'd never been out of green fields and clover, and that 'ere innocent sort of thing all the days of his mortal existence. Here, my cherry blossom," he added, taking the shilling and chucking it over to Jim, "cut off at once and buy grub for the young 'uns, and to-morrow by day-light we'll expect

you at the old shop, which I think you knows already, by reason of having come there so often to look up the old 'un. Make my complerments to him when he comes in (that is to say if he's in a condition to value the blessing), and in the meantime, ladies and gemmen, I've the honor to bid you a werry good evening."

He bowed himself out of the room with mock politeness as he finished speaking, and hustling John before him to prevent him breaking out into some savage observation, the two were in another moment out of sight and hearing at the foot of the staircase.

CHAPTER IX.

EARLY as it was when Jim proceeded to his new occupation on the following morning, he found his employers already waiting for him at the corner of the street, where they were supposed to reside. The hand-barrow with which they were to proceed through the city was already well stocked with flowers, arranged with considerable attention as to color and effect, primroses and violets being grouped with hyacinths and yellow crocuses, snowdrops set side by side with clusters of hepaticas, sky-blue, single and double crimson; and these, again, so cunningly relieved by a back ground of wall-flowers and dark ivy,

that it was no great wonder, if Jim, passionately fond as he was of gardening, should have stood for a moment in stupid admiration, forgetful of all else besides, and only conscious that he had never known flowers to show so brilliantly before. A sharp rap over the knuckles, administered by John Nightshade, soon roused him from his reverie, and after Dick had given him a lesson as to the services expected of him, they proceeded down the street, John pushing the barrow before him, and the other two shouting at the top of their lungs, "all a growing, all a blowing; whose for flowers this fine spring-morning—violets and primrose, snowdrop and crocus—all a growing, all a blowing—whose for flowers this fine spring morning?"

"Blowed if I can sing any longer on that note," cried Dick, suddenly stopping at the end of a street after he had proceeded in this fashion for about a quarter-of-an-hour. "I say, Johnny, my voice is regularly done up for the day, so you'd best go on without me, and if your way should chance to lie thro' Manchester-square, don't you go calling on the old lady that lives at

No. 19, (right-hand side of the corner) for I'm werry much afeard if you do, you won't get such a reception as a man of your merit has a right for to look for."

"Why not," John gruffly answered. "What's got the old fool that she should set up her back at me that way I wonder?"

"As far as I understand the matter," replied Dick, touching his own forehead significantly to give due effect to his words, "she carn't be altogether too right in the upper story, for she fancies, old stoopid, she actually fancies, my Johnny, as her flunky informed me, that you poisoned them tulips you sold her last week."

"The d— old idiot," said Nightshade, sullenly. "Don't I wish I had the whopping of her! I'd soon teach her, and mighty quick too, to hold her d— prating tongue, and not to spoil an honest man's trade by blowing that way on his precious reputation."

"All right, and got the receipt," cried Dick, who evidently took a malicious pleasure in the annoyance exhibited by his companion, "so' bye! bye! Johnny. Jimmy, lily of the walley,

tune up. Bles't if you don't sing like a nightingale already, needing no instruction wotever to be a most invallyable acquisition to gemmen of our perfesshion."

The jolly costermonger waited no reply, but turning into a narrow street was out of sight in a moment, while John putting his hand once more to the barrow, wheeled moodily on.

During the rest of the day they continued to traffic, with about the average amount of success which attends a costermonger's sale of flowers in London. Here and there they were stopped by a foot passenger, an old dame perhaps on her way to market, or a young girl going to school, and anxious for the possession of a pot of violets or snowdrops, to be afterwards carried away beneath her shawl; or else they were hailed from the window of some tradesman's house, and a parlour maid stept forth to bargain for a small lot of flowers to be grouped together on a flower stand.

Jim rather enjoyed the kind of trafficking that usually took place on these occasions, and seated unnoticed on the shaft of the barrow was quite willing to listen, if need were for hours, to the

rough jokes and compliments amid which it was carried on. In this manner a week or two passed happily on, and between the good effects of constant work and better food, Jim appeared to his delighted mother, to recover something of the strength of mind and body which he had lost some months before by fever. He had been originally a boy of remarkably quick intellect, and in all her troubles, and they were many and grievous, arising from her husband's drunken habits, Mrs. Darville had been accustomed to look to Jim for comfort and support. Mind and body had been in consequence overtaxed, and a severe brain fever, from which he narrowly escaped with life, had left him subject to fits of depression so deep and intense as almost to amount to insanity. At such times he would sit for days as one deprived of reason, without opening his lips or attempting to assist his mother at her trade, or else he would wander into the country, from whence, after an absence of many hours, he would return laden only with grasses and wild flowers, but restored to his ordinary state of mind.

What Mrs. Darville suffered at first upon these occasions probably no one but a mother can understand, but fortunately she was a woman of more than ordinary sense and shrewdness for her class, and when she saw that Jim's passionate love of flowers (for which he had always been remarkable), could be made conducive to his recovery, she ceased to make any objection to his wanderings, and received him on his return with so much affectionate indulgence that he was the first to blame himself for his idleness, and to take upon himself, by way of amends, a more than ordinary proportion of the labours of the household.

Nothing, consequently, could have been devised more satisfactory to his mother's feelings or his own than his present employment. Under its healing influence health and strength rapidly returned, and his mind fixed continually on a favorite pursuit, became strengthened to resist the fits of despondency to which it had hitherto been a passive victim. No wonder his poor, pale mother smiled, or that his employers professed themselves well pleased with his exertions, for

his natural quickness of intellect now stood him in good stead, and in a marvellously short time he became quite conversant not only with the names of the various flowers of the season, but with their relative value also, and the prices they ought severally to command in the market. Apart from the recollections of his home trials, therefore, Jim was as happy as a boy could be. John Nightshade indeed turned out on further trial to be, as his very countenance prognosticated of him, a morose and ill-tempered fellow, but Dick, who occasionally took his turn at the barrow, was a man of a very different mould.

Naturally careless and light hearted, he cajoled his customers out of their money, as much it seemed in fun and frolic as in malice, and when he had no one else to joke with, he would chat good humouredly with Jim, treating him even occasionally to a mug of hot coffee and a lump of the black dough cake which usually accompanies that luxury, when sold out to customers at street corners. Such unwonted kindness had its full effect on the boy's heart. He

became really attached to Dick, and anxious both from feelings of gratitude and affection to assist him in his business. Nor was he at all unsuccessful in these efforts; many a passenger being won to the barrow by his eager looks, or induced to purchase where he had only paused to criticize or admire, by the boy's enthusiastic admiration of his own merchandise; an admiration too truly natural and impromptu not to be above the suspicions even of a purchaser in the London market. Dick soon perceived that he had obtained in Jim far more than the mere vocal qualities for which he had at first engaged him, and he encouraged him to fresh exertions in every way he could; now by approval both of voice and eye, or at other times by the judicious investment of a penny, in reward for some more than usually successful transaction.

After this had occurred once or twice, Jim naturally enough began to think himself a very clever fellow, and visions would even sometimes haunt him of the time when, by laying up a little money, he might start a barrow on his own account; or better still, by procuring a place at

a market gardener's, cultivate his much loved blossoms in their proper haunts.

Alas! such a state of things as we have described was far too pleasant to last long. Rumours began to reach Mrs. Darville's ears as to the mode of life of the "free foresters" with whom her son had become associated, and once his attention had been directed to the subject, Jim himself was forced, however unwillingly, to suspect the honesty of his employers. His unsettled state of mind being well known to them, they were far less careful than they otherwise would have been in concealing the nature of their transactions from him, and he soon found by their conversation that the route they were to take each day was a matter of much graver consideration than at first seemed needful, and that however successful they might have been upon any particular beat, a considerable period of time was always suffered to elapse before it was again attempted. Sometimes he even ventured to remonstrate with them upon this apparent inattention to their own interests, reminding them that the inhabitants of such and such a house

had requested him to call again, but he was always answered either by a scowl from John, or a comical face and a poke in the ribs from Dick, which however unintelligible it proved in the beginning, became at last from constant repetition indicative of evil even to his unsuspecting mind. As time went on he discovered also that his employers had a very bad memory for former customers, either totally ignoring their acquaintanceship when they met them, or crossing the street in order more effectually to avoid them. These occurrences, and a hundred others of a similar nature, at last oppressed his mind to such a degree that he resolved, cost what it might, to find out for himself what was the real character of the business which, as "free foresters," his comrades carried on. With the characteristic secrecy of one of unsettled mind, he said nothing to his mother either of his suspicions or intentions; but rising one day before the sun, proceeded at once to the usual place of rendezvous, in hopes of surprising the secret of his companions by coming upon them at a moment when they were unprepared for his presence.

He did not intend, indeed, openly to beat up their quarters, and there was both shrewdness and courage in the course which, after some anxious cogitation with himself, he resolved to pursue.

In answer to every enquiry which he had hitherto ventured to make on the subject, Dick had always assured him that they supplied themselves by contract with flowers from Covent Garden, and in order to test the truth of this bold assertion, he took up his station in the shadow of an old archway, which was the only mode of entrance to the lane where the foresters lived. Nor had he long to wait, for in about ten minutes after he had thus taken up his position, Dick Daredevil made his appearance from the opposite direction, and bending beneath some formidable burthen which he carried on his shoulders, slowly and wearily approached the archway.

Well aware of the consequences to himself if his eaves dropping were discovered, the boy shrank closer and closer beneath the shadows of the wall, hardly daring to breathe lest he should attract

the forester's attention; but Dick had followed his calling too long with impunity to look out very sharply for danger, and without pausing for a single moment turned at once into the archway, passing so close by Jim as he did so, that he actually touched him with one end of the sack he carried. It was a minute or more before Jim had sufficiently shaken off the trepidation into which this close encounter threw him, to follow the other as he had originally intended; but as Dick was compelled by the weight he carried to walk at a slow pace, he managed to overtake him just in time to see him enter his own home and close the door behind him. Another moment of suspense ensued, and then the lad ascertained by the sound of his voice that his master had ascended to the bed-room which looked over the doorway, and which was usually occupied by Nightshade. Jim began to breathe more freely now, for being well acquainted with the premises, he knew that if, as he suspected, the men were engaged in conversation in that room, there was nothing to prevent his slipping unperceived into the yard, where they had always

latterly waited his coming. At the further end of this yard was an old out-house, where prepared earth, empty flower pots, and all the necessary apparatus of their trade were usually stowed away, and placing himself behind a pile of these, in such a way that he could see and hear without being seen, Jim prepared to await the issue of the adventure. The sack, filled apparently almost to bursting, which Dick had carried upon his shoulders was lying near, but he had scarcely a moment to speculate upon its probable contents, ere the two men entered from the house, and proceeded at once to unbutton the object of his curiosity from top to bottom.

Then to the boy's infinite astonishment forth came from its deep recesses a quantity of flowering plants and shrubs of the most various descriptions, as to use and value; but all alike so crushed, and tumbled, and earth soiled, apparently beyond possibility of restoration that he could hardly believe, what yet he most naturally suspected, that these would prove the brilliant show of flowers which, in an hour or two he would have to cry through the city. His suspicions were

speedily justified by the proceedings of the two men, who without any conversation, save an observation from John as to his comrades "having done a precious sight of business that night," commenced at once to sort and arrange the contents of the sack, first cleansing every plant carefully in water, then cutting off, here a bruised blossom, there a broken branch, and finally setting them in pots, which, fortunately for Jim's chances of remaining undiscovered, were already filled with mould, and placed for that purpose in the middle of the yard. One early rose-tree in particular seemed to be the object of their anxious care. It had been snapt nearly asunder just below that part of the stem which should appear above ground, and Dick proceeded to splice the broken parts carefully together, saying as he did so, "P'raps they'll join, and p'raps they won't; but wot then? Early roses fetches a price this time of year, as we carn't afford to lose a chance of—so ere goes for to set it in a pot. It will hold good for the day, I daresay, and to-morrow, as the phi—lo—so—phers say, must take care of itself. I say,

John," he continued, bursting into a rogue's loud laugh, "won't it be a jolly good sell if some old leddy take a desp'rate fancy to this 'ere little rose-tree, and forks out 'ansome for it—only you must dispose of it, my bird of paradise, as soon as you can; for, in course, it will begin to wither in no time."

John only laughed, his surly, vindictive laugh, which always sounded as if he had an old score to pay off against the world, and rejoiced at any cunning trick by which he could wipe off a portion of the total; and then the two men proceeded without further parley to pour into each pot a small quantity of some liquid, which Jim instantly conjectured to possess the property of stimulating the flowers into unnatural bloom, for the sake of improving their value in the market.

He had lived too long among costermongers (the class to which free foresters, as men in the occupation of his present employers are called, most usually belong,) not to have heard of such tricks before, and he also knew that these unhealthy stimulants were most destructive to the real welfare of the plant, nature always reveng-

ing herself by the rapid fading away of leaf and flower, while even the root itself was often destroyed by the deleterious process to which it had been subjected.

The proceedings of the foresters, hitherto so wrapped in mystery, their cheap sale of expensive plants, their careful arrangement of their daily beats, and avoidance of quondam customers, all in fact that had ever caused him a moment's wonder or conjecture, was made evident in a moment. Too evident, alas! for if the flowers were really stolen first, and afterwards doctored for the market, it was plain that his service with such men must cease, and that he must abandon an employment which made its profits by a fraud. Gladly indeed would he have departed on the instant, but he felt it would have been quite as much as his life was worth to have been found in his present position, and as it was impossible for him to leave it unnoticed, he was beginning to feel exceedingly uncomfortable, when Dick unintentionally came to his relief by saying, with outstretched arms and a frightful amount of yawning:

"Blowed if this 'ere owl's work ain't werry fatiguing to a cove of my delicate constitootion. I say, Jack, I'm off to roost, I am, and mind you bring back an odd bob or two on that 'ere precious little rose tree, and you can tell the old leddy as buys it, with my best complerments, that I means to call on her to-morrow."

This latter piece of facetiousness was nearly lost to the appreciation of his auditors, for he had reached the door of his domicile ere it was uttered, but hardly was Dick's foot upon the threshold than crying out:

"Blast him, if he ain't a gone, and taken the best pruning knife along with him," John darted after him, and vanished also through the doorway.

The moment was propitious, and quick as lightning Jim darted from his prison. He would have left the yard altogether, but he feared he might be seen and followed, so mentally resolving that this day's service should be his last, he occupied himself in arranging the flowers on their tray until John Nightshade re-appeared. Possibly it was only his fears, but he thought

the man looked suspiciously upon him, though nothing was said to justify the idea, and after a gruff good morning on either side, for there was no love lost between them, they proceeded to their work in silence. With all his anxiety, however, to disarm suspicion, Jim could not find it in his conscience to put the broken rose tree on the barrow, but the other soon perceived and rectified this omission by placing it in a most conspicuous position, and then they set forth together, poor Jim feeling every time he shouted forth "all a growing," as if he were uttering a deliberate falsehood. He was, in fact, in such a confusion of heart and brain that he could not settle in his own mind as to whether it was his duty to abscond on the instant, or whether it were lawful to remain until evening had brought his day's service to a close. The latter proceeding his well founded fears of John's powers of revenge greatly inclined him to adopt, while on the other hand it seemed to him as if his very presence at the side of the forester made him a partner in his fraudulent transactions. While thus vacillating between the promptings of remorse and

fear, he followed his master from street to street, and from square to square, with only one fixed purpose in his mind, which was that sooner than allow the broken rose tree to become an object of purchase to any one, he would proclaim him a thief upon the spot, whatever the consequences might prove to himself. To do full justice to the magnanimity of this resolution, it must be remembered that Jim's mind had by no means recovered the strength and clearness of perception of which it had been robbed by fever, and therefore that he had formed to himself a very exaggerated idea of the power of the foresters, never even remembering that he had law and justice clearly on his side, and that in unveiling an imposition practised on the public, he might reckon very positively on that public for support. His only thought was of John Nightshade, the weight of John Nightshade's hand, the scowl of his eye, and more than all the rest, the muttered curse, which he had learned to dread as an omen of deeper vengeance in the future. Occupied in such uncomfortable speculations as these, it was of course with no very pleasant sensations

that he marked John's incessant endeavours to puff off the rose tree, or the internal growl that invariably rebuked his own timid efforts to put forward some less exceptional object of merchandise, in order to retard or prevent the disposal of the other. He had tried this manœuvre quite often enough to arouse the forester's suspicions, when they were accosted by a lady in deep mourning, who intimated by signs that she wished to become the purchaser of the rose tree.

"A foreigner, by jingo!" cried John. "If that ain't high luck now, I don't know what is. I say, young man, stand back," he added, pushing Jim rudely on one side; "you've spoilt more than one good bargain for me already, and you shan't spoil another if I can help it; so stand back, will you, or reckon upon as good a hiding as ever you got in your life, if you dare to utter a syllable for the next ten minutes."

This threat, enforced, as it was, by a scowl of most determined malice, was sufficient for the moment to impose silence upon Jim.

He slunk quietly behind the barrow, while the other proceeded gravely to separate the rose tree

from the other plants, and holding up four fingers of his hand as an intimation to his customer of the number of shillings he expected her to pay, she was actually taking them out of her purse, when Jim, unable to bear the upbraiding of his conscience a moment longer, sprang forward, tore the rose tree from its flower pot before John had the smallest idea of his intentions, and flourishing the rootless stem before her eyes, exclaimed, in total forgetfulness of her ignorance of English :

“ Sure it’s bruck clane down to the very stim, my lady. The ould rascal is chatin’ you, he is. Any of the other plants is bad enough, may be, but the rose tree bates banagher for a decait altogether.”

Thus admonished, for if she could not understand his words, the rootless rose tree formed a very sufficient commentary upon them, the lady drew back her hand, and the money she had been about to drop into John’s open palm was again deposited in her purse.

The baffled rogue turned instantly upon Jim, but the latter had caught the flash of his angry

eye, and not caring to come into closer contact with him, was off like a shot. Happily for him John was too much embarrassed by the charge of his barrow to attempt a pursuit, and he succeeded in reaching his mother's garret in safety. Once there he flung himself into her arms, but between fear and the confusion which any unusual event always excited in his brain, it was some time before she understood the true state of the case.

When at length she did so, she was divided between pleasure at this new proof of the incorruptible honesty of her boy, and anguish at his consequent loss of an employment which with her own scanty earnings formed the sole means of subsistence her family were possessed of; not for a moment, however, did she prove false to her duty as a mother; she praised him for his honest firmness, soothed him as well as she could with the promise of better times, carefully avoided, until his first agitation had passed away, any allusion to the dire necessity that was again staring them in the face, and meanwhile repeated over and over again the simple lesson which she had taught him from his cradle, "that

God knew best, and it was sinful to murmur at His holy will, but that sooner or later she was certain He would prove to them that honesty was the best policy after all."

Unfortunately her husband was little inclined to adopt this view of the matter. He had learned the history of the rose tree from the revengeful lips of John himself, and furious at being cut off from the chance of the odd pennies which to quiet him Jim often made over to his possession, he beat the poor boy that night till he could stand over him no longer, and then rifling his pockets of the last coppers they contained, went straight off to the ale house with them.

"Never mind, mother dear, never mind," said Jim, gently touching his mother's shoulder after a long pause, during which the poor woman had sat motionless, her head wrapt in an old shawl, mourning in the very bitterness of her mother's heart over the sufferings of her boy. "Sure if he bate me widin an inch of my life I wouldn't care at all at all so long as he let you and the childhre alone."

"And don't I know that you wouldn't, acushla," rejoined his mother, yielding to a long suppressed fit of weeping. "But och, musha! musha! is it any rayson becase you are good and thtrue, as you ever war, mavourneen, that I shouldn't be heart sore to see you bate worse nor a dog, and by the very fader, too, that ought to be as proud as a paycock of yer honesty, so he ought! Ah, Harry Darville! Harry Darville!" she half-muttered to herself, "it's little I thought when you wheedled me into followin' you to this big could hearted London, bad luck to it, that you'd turn yer back on yer own flesh an' blood, and spend all we've left in the ale-house."

"If he'd only left us them purthy little coppers," said Jim in a half musing manner, "we'd have had something anyways for to-morrow. Howsomdever, it's no use fretting about it, so if you'll go to bed, mother, I'll just set to and finish the scrap of work that I see you've lift yander beyant unfinished."

"Its only Lizzy's ould shoe I was thryin to mind for her," the mother was beginning, when Jim, who had risen to fetch it turned very pale,

and uttering a low cry sank back on his seat again.

"What is it, avourneen? what is it?" cried the frightened mother, who had more than once since his fever seen him suffer in this manner from the violence of his father. "Sure it's rale downright murder it is, for to bate a boy in that fashion. What ails you, abouchal? won't you tell your own mammy what ails you, darlint?"

Thus adjured, Jim lifted up his heavy head and let it rest upon his mother's shoulder. "Sure it's nothing, jist nothing at all," he murmured. "Only the quare feelin' that do come over me at times, makin' me seem for all the world as if my sinses war desartin me."

"God keep sich a sorrow from us, avourneen," replied the poor mother, parting the boy's hair, and dabbing his temples with a rag which she had dipt in cold water for the purpose. "See there now, the color's comin' back into your lips and cheeks again, my darlint, and if you could only get a bit of sleep to-night, to-morrow you'll be as fresh as a rose, and ready to gauther chickweed in the fields wid Lizzy; and that'll be

betther diversion, won't it? nor followin' a couple of chatin' costermongers thro' the hot streets of London."

"Deed will it!" cried the boy rousing at once at this judicious allusion to his favorite employment. "And, mother dear, I hard only yesterday of a house in the city, where they do have water-cresses every mornin' for breakfast. The boy that sarved them is dead, and who knows but what if I gauthered them fresh an' fresh, I mightn't git the revarsion myself; anyways it would be no harrum to thry."

Satisfied with having accomplished this change in his ideas, Mrs. Darville, judiciously made no reply, and with his head still resting on her shoulder, Jim was gradually sinking into a much needed slumber, when he was roused again by a noise upon the stairs.

"It's Harry come back," cried Mrs. Darville in uncontrollable agitation. "Hide yourself, bouchal, lay down beside the childhre, or he'll be the death of you entirely."

"It ain't father's step," said Jim, listening, "and there's more nor half-a-dozen on 'em besides."

"Holy Mary," cried the poor woman trembling all over with one of those inexplicable presentiments which so often and so strangely warn us of coming evil.

"It's kilt, he is, wid the dhrink an' fightin', and they're carryin' him up-stairs."

Jim seized the solitary candle, and followed by his mother, rushed out upon the landing place. It was already filled with men and women, some of the former being bearers of a door which seemed to have been taken off its hinges for the purpose, and upon which lay an awful *something*, covered mysteriously with a sheet.

At the sudden appearance of Mrs. Darville, most of the men who surrounded it fell back, while one or two of the women made a movement as if they would prevent her approach.

But she was at the side of the stretcher before they had time to prevent it, and taking the candle from Jim with one hand, with the other drew back the covering.

It was even as her heart had told her. With his once fiery face now as pale as ashes, with the angry eyes now dimmed and sunken, and the

swollen features shrunk and fixed beyond all possibility of future re-animation, Harry Darville lay there before her, and he was dead.

The history of his closing hours it needed few words to tell; a drinking bout and a quarrel, a blow and a fit, less the effect of injury than excitement. It has been the history of thousands ere his time. It will be the history of thousands yet, who venture to live as he did!

CHAPTER X.

ALL that weary night Jim and his mother knelt side by side by the corpse of the man, who had been so suddenly and so fearfully summoned to his doom. There he lay before them, a fearful and disfigured object, and the widow's heart died within her as she looked upon him and remembered how he had lived and how he had died. He, to whom she had given herself in the fearless gladness of a fresh young heart; he, for whose sake and at whose persuasion she had left her own home and her own people, while yet almost a child in years and inexperience, to seek with him a living among strangers; he, for whom, and

for whose children, she had ever since toiled and plodded, and hoped, and prayed with a love that knew not how to weary or complain; he, who, but for this one vice, which brutalized and unmanned him, might still have been good, and industrious, and loving as she once thought him; but who, as every other drunkard does, had long since swamped any natural good gifts he might have been possessed of, in an ocean of maddening and soul enslaving gin; he had gone, as such men, alas! too often go, without a moment for repentance, with hardly an instant, as it seemed to human eyes, between his crime and its hour of judgment.

He had gone;—but whither, and to what? Mrs. Darville dared not ask herself the question, and so she turned from the terrible unknown in which her husband's present state was plunged to pray for the children whom he had left, that they might ever be preserved from the fatal vice to which their father had fallen a victim.

A coroner's inquest, a coffin of deal boards, and a parish funeral were the next items in this history of sorrow, and when all was over and the

little family were left once more to carry on their hard struggle with poverty and the world, Jim and his mother stood gazing upon each other in considerable perplexity as to how this was to be accomplished.

"There's nothin' for it but the 'house' afther all, dear, I'mafeard," observed Mrs. Darville, after a long and sorrowful pause, during which her eye had wandered by turns from the empty fire grate to the group of half naked children who sat in a corner of the room, huddled together for the sake of warmth, and too much exhausted by cold and hunger even to utter their complaints aloud.

"The house!" echoed Jim. "But where's the use, mother, when you towld me only the other day that they wouldn't let us in for love or money, but just pass us on to Ireland to live or die as best plaizes the Almighty?"

"Troth would they, dear, or may be I'd have tried them long ago. But you see me and the poor man that's gone (God rest him!) we were born and married in Ireland, and so if I ask relief, it will be to Ireland sure enough they'll be

sending me for to find it, tho' God knows, what wid one thing or another, there mayn't be so much as one remaining in the parish, that can remember the girleen that I was when I left it dancing for joy like to the music of my own heart just thirteen years ago. And that's why I don't want to go there, acushla, for sure here we've a little thrade and might have more if the times grew betther; but there we must make up our minds to starve entirely, since there's no one of my own people left that I know of to care a trauneen about us."

"There now, don't be down-hearted about it," said Jim, who saw that his mother's tears were beginning to flow fast at this reminiscence of her early home; "don't be down-hearted about it, and I'll go to Misther Hardman this minute I will, and if he havn't got a heart harder nor the very stones, that his big house is built of, he'll give you a job for this wanst just to keep us from starvation."

Mrs. Darville tried to smile, but though she did not attempt to dissuade him from his purpose, she could not refrain from shaking her head

in a way that showed how little she hoped from Mr. Hardman's clemency.

The remainder of the afternoon was therefore spent by Jim in walking from one wholesale establishment in the boot making trade to another, imploring with all the eloquence his urgent wants inspired, what he called a "spell of work for his mother and himself." Alas! in every instance he was destined to meet with a rebuff, and Mr. Hardman in particular showed himself more than usually inexorable, in consequence of feeling himself aggrieved by the boy's former attempts at keeping up the original rate of wages. Baffled at last and weary, the poor fellow was fain unwillingly to confess to himself that for that night at least success was hopeless, and he was beginning slowly to retrace his steps towards his miserable home, when he saw, or fancied that he saw, John Nightshade leaning against a lamp-post in the very street which he was intending to go down. Jim, as may easily be supposed, was by no means anxious for the renewal of an intimacy which had terminated so unsatisfactorily before, and

devoutly hoping that he had not been recognized by his slippery acquaintance, he turned short off into a narrow lane, which he fancied would lead him in an opposite direction.

Down this he proceeded at a rapid pace, but he had not gone far before his quick ear caught the sound of a stealthy tread behind him. He did not venture to look back, lest he should give the forester, (if it indeed were he) an opportunity to hail him, and as little did he dare to run, for he felt that John could overtake him in an instant, so he went on dodging down first one dark lane and then another, in hopes of shaking off his pursuer, until he found himself involved in such an intricacy of streets and alleys that he no longer knew where he was. Nevertheless the mysterious pit-a-pat was still behind him, and he could not pause to reconnoitre; so though the evening was rapidly closing in, and the lamps were here and there beginning to twinkle in the distance, he continued to go blindly on, until at last entirely losing his presence of mind he took to his heels and fled. He might have spared himself the trouble, the feet behind him instantly

quickened to a run, and feeling that they were every moment gaining on him, Jim plunged at a venture down an alley which having, unluckily for him, no other out-let, he was brought to incontinently by a dead wall at the further end. A heavy hand was instantly laid upon his shoulder, and Jim resigned himself at once to the idea of a beating. Great was his astonishment, therefore, when he found himself saluted by John Nightshade, for it was he in fact, in a voice infinitely more kind and cheery than he had ever heard from his lips before.

“Why, Jim, my fine fellar, what manners you have! I say, do you always tear away that 'ere fashion when a gent wants to shake hands with you?”

The unexpected kindness of this address was too much for Jim. A beating he had anticipated, and could have borne, but kindness upset his assumed fortitude altogether, and he burst into tears.

“Crying?” questioned John, in a very different tone from that in which he had uttered the same words on the first night of their

acquaintance. "Why what's that for? I know that you've lost the old 'un, but I shouldn't have thought that a reason for wet eyes, because tho' a very good fellow indeed in a 'public,' he must have been rayther out of rule I should say as a family man?"

"It warn't altogether that," said Jim, honestly, trying at the same time to check his emotion. "But I thought you war going to bate me, mister John, so the kind word tuck me by surprise like."

"Oh, you thought I was going to wallop you, did you?" John answered with a look which seemed to say he would have liked greatly to make good the suspicion. "Well, I won't say but what it *was* a dirty trick you played us, Jim, for to peach on a pal is what never should be allowed among gemmen. However, I don't want to be down upon you for that just now you see, because I know that you must have a good deal on your mind to worrit you already."

Greatly encouraged, and completely taken in by this appearance of benevolence, Jim now ventured to reveal the history of his troubles, dwelling chiefly on the misery of having to

return to his mother that night, without any immediate prospect for the amelioration of their condition. To all this, John listened in silence, and if there was a gleam of sullen joy upon his countenance, Jim not unnaturally attributed it to the prospect of doing a kind act, for no sooner had he finished speaking than his auditor exclaimed :

“ The scaly old griffin! (by which elegant appellation he meant to designate Mr. Hardman) strike me ugly, if he doesn’t deserve to be left at low waters himself for refusing a lift to a gent of your merit and inches. Well, now, my tulip, you see as softness is one thing and gammon another, I couldn’t rightly ask you to join us again, because one more such d—— fit of honesty as took you last time would be the spoiling to all eternity of the business we go on. Nevertheless, I am very willing to do you a good turn elsewhere if I can, and I do know a cove in the city that is looking for hands in the boot sewing line. He is in the wholesale line, and with a good word from me would set up both you and the old woman at once in the

article of work. I say with a good word from me, for he is rayther of a methody turn of mind, is my friend, and uncommon partic'lar in course as to the characters of his people."

"And the pay?" asked Jim, his whole face blazing at this unexpected prospect of employment.

"Very good pay indeed," the other responded. "Because my pal, you see, ain't by no means close fisted by nature, and in course them as he employs have no reason to grumble. Bless'ee, lad, I've knowed him when times were bad, fling jingo right and left among his people as if he'd kept it in his pocket for that purpose alone."

Of course Jim was all eagerness to go and offer himself to this paragon of boot makers, and of course also John affected at first to demur. "It was late," he said, and he was tired, and it was a long way besides to that part of the town where his friend resided; but in the midst of all this hesitation, he cunningly contrived to insinuate so many fears as to the chances of the former having already filled up the number of his hands if they delayed to apply till the morn-

ing, that Jim not only grew more and more resolute to seek him that same night, but felt it in fact as a very great favor when the other consented at last to do so with the characteristic observation, that if they did go, they must walk like winky, for it was a frightful step further into the city.

Having once, however, suffered himself to be persuaded, John seemed generously to put aside all further hesitation on the subject, and taking Jim patronizingly by the hand, they set off together at a pace that, half trot halfwalk, without being actually a run, was in fact nearly as rapid. Down one lane they plunged and up another, faster and faster and faster still, until leaving the better inhabited streets entirely behind them, they merged into narrow places dim, dark and dirty even to the well accustomed eyes of Jim. At such an hour of course not many respectable persons were to be seen abroad, but in their stead they too often came suddenly upon knots of suspicious looking individuals conversing together under the shade of the houses, and once they were encountered by a ruffianly looking fellow

who appeared not altogether unknown to the forester, albeit the deep brimmed wide awake slouched over his brow, and the neck cloth which buried the lower part of his face entirely in its folds, suggested even to the unsuspecting Jim the idea of intentional concealment. Policemen also, were to be seen at first, keen, though unobtrusive observers of every passing creature, but even this sign of civilization failed them in the end, and frightened and confused he could scarce tell wherefore, for one brief moment Jim entertained the desperate idea of shaking himself loose from his conductor's grasp and flying for his life. It was dismissed, however, almost as soon as it occurred, for even admitting that he could have extricated himself without a guide from the labyrinth of streets in which he had become involved, (a thing certainly more than doubtful,) he felt sure that if John really intended mischief, he must have plenty of pals, as he called them, in that part of the city, who would not only join in the hue and cry against him, but if they could catch him, would make him pay dearly enough for having attempted to escape.

Wisely, therefore, making a merit of necessity, he submitted without any remonstrance to the guidance of his companion and after a sharp walk of about an hour's duration, they stopped before a dingy, faded looking mansion, situated at the end of a long street composed of other houses as dingy and faded looking as itself. A low and peculiar tap at the door of this unpromising looking abode, brought a showily dressed damsel to their aid, and while chucking her under the chin with the air of an old acquaintance, John explained to her, that he had taken the liberty of bringing a young shaver with him, who was looking everywhere for an honest occupation and could find it nowhere.

"Any one as you brings with you, sir, must be welcome surelie," the young lady responded with a simper, "walk in, my dear, and please mind where you steps, for yonder staircase is rayther of the steepest."

Certainly it was, and notwithstanding the warning, Jim would probably have fallen headlong down it, if John had not saved him the trouble by laying hold of his collar and hustling

him along with a muttered imprecation which sounded badly enough for the lad's future chances. The room into which he was thus summarily introduced seemed intended to serve both as kitchen and parlour to its ordinary inhabitants. A furious fire blazed on the hearth, and the place was so redolent with tobacco smoke and gin, that it was a moment or more before Jim's eyes had sufficiently recovered from the blinding effects of their fumes to discover a party of ill-favoured men and worse favoured women seated together at a table, drinking, smoking, gambling and quarrelling, as it seemed all in one breath, while another group, younger in years, but nearly as old in wickedness, was similarly employed at the other end of the room.

In his first bewilderment Jim turned for explanation to his conductor, but the look of triumphant malice that now gleamed openly out of John's dark eyes, only served to convince him he had been cruelly ensnared.

"Make yourself at home, my young friend," he observed bowing to the unhappy boy, with an air of mock respect, "this ere gent at the

head of the table is the pal that I spoke of, and he'll give you occupation enough I daresay if it's that that you're arter."

" May be he hasn't got any just now that would shute me," said Jim, trying hard to speak calmly and show no distrust, " any way, I see his honor is engaged to-night, and I wouldn't like to throuble him with my little bizness in the midst of his pleasures; so if you plaize, Misther John, I'll come back to-morrow when he'll have slep off his licker."

" Not so fast, my mannie," replied John, putting himself between the door and his victim, " don't you know that you are preciously in my debt already, and that I ain't the man to let you out of this ere abode of peace and plenty, till you've paid me up to the last farthing."

" Ah, then sure it's just funning you must be, Misther John," replied Jim, opening his eyes extremely wide at this unlooked for accusation. " Sure wasn't I working wid you every blessed day of the week, just barring the last two, and never got nothing at all for my pains—not that I thought of asking," he added, remembering the

danger of putting John in the wrong in his own stronghold—"not that I thought of asking, nor mother neither, because of coarse it warn't rightly to be expected, considerin' the way that I left yez."

"And may I ask you if you think that you owe me nothing for that," replied John with a scowl so ferocious that Jim felt as if his heart had shrunk down to his shoe strings, "or if you figure John Nightshade to yourself as a cove likely to let himself be sold gratis for the amusement of a little beggar like you. I only ask, my man, because if you do, it is but fair to undeceive you, and to make you once for all aware that I never stand no nonsense with no one, and that if you owe me nothing else, you owe me at any rate a pretty considerable lot of revenge which I mean to take out of you before you set a foot out of this."

This savage speech wound up Jim's previous terrors to such a height, that feeling certain his life was endangered, and quite forgetting the odds against him, he rushed towards the door in the desperate hope of effecting his escape. John,

however, was as quick as he was and, alas, much stronger; his great arms were around the fugitive in a moment, and before Jim knew rightly what had happened he felt himself lifted off his feet, and carried amid the jeers of the spectators down a dark, steep ladder, which led to a cellar underneath the kitchen. Into this kind of prison he was violently hurled by his vindictive captor, and when the door was closed upon him from the outside he found himself in a den so dark that he could barely see his hand, and so deep, apparently, in the bowels of the earth, that but for the movements of the rats which his entrance had disturbed, he felt as if he could almost have heard the loud beatings of his own heart.

After waiting for a few minutes to see if his tyrant would return, he managed to grope his way back again as far as the door; not that he imagined he should find it open, but simply that he hoped through crevice, or through key hole, to discover some sound of life overhead, which might remove that irrepressible sensation of fear that had crept over him in the darkness and solitude of the place. But either the cellar was

too far away, or the drunken revelry was over, for nothing reached his ear save the ceaseless gnawing of the rats around him, and in his dread of encountering one of these disgusting animals he remained perfectly mute and motionless, coiled up into as small a compass as he could manage to compress himself against the wall, when the low breathing of some thing or creature apparently close at his side brought his terror to a climax, and an irrepressible cry of agony escaped from his lips.

"Hush!" said a low, sweet voice, not as it seemed a yard from his elbow. "Hush! and if you are very good and quiet now, poor boy, they will certainly let you out to-morrow."

"Who's there?" cried Jim. "Lord save us!" he added, rapidly crossing himself. "May be it was only a spurrit afther all."

"It is only I," replied the childish voice, which seemed to have moved in the interval a little nearer to him.

"Arrah! and who is I?" asked Jim, somewhat reassured by this apparently human rejoinder to his question.

"Aileen," was the short, low answer.

"Musha, then," Jim answered, all his former doubts again recurring to his mind; "but if you are the girleen that I take you for, it's wondherful it is, how you did manage to get in, for the door behind me is locked and bolted, and the key not in it at all, at all."

"It's on the outside though," replied the child, "and I came in when you were over there. Bill told me the new boy was in it, and I wanted to tell you not to be frightened, because it's not so bad as it seems. They put me in often, and at first the rats frightened me dreadfully, but I got used to them at last, and so in time will you."

"You don't mane for to tell me," cried Jim, "that they have shut you in here. Why, judgin' from your voice and hoith, for sorra glimpse can I catch of your purthy face in the darkness, but jist guessin like from your voice and hoith, you can't be more nor a slip of a gerril that would be afeard to fight wid a blue bottle fly, let alone wid the rats that, bad luck to them, are scamperin' an' squeelin' about us."

"Yes, but they did though," replied the child, a sob that was quite involuntary showing how much she was touched by Jim's evident sympathy.

"Ough, the hathins!" cried Jim, all personal fear swallowed up in indignation at such cruelty practised on one even more helpless than himself. "The cowld-blooded, murtherin' haythins, to daure for to trate a christian babby like that!" and groping his way as well as he could in the dark he soon had his arm round a little creature soft and downy as a kitten, who when she felt how gently he handled her, clung to him as though there were protection in his touch.

"And what did they do it for, darlint? Yerra! don't you be a sobbin' that way, but tell what did they do it for, won't you?"

"For shaking the doll," replied Aileen. "I always do shake it, and that's why I'm in here so often."

"For shakin' the doll!" Jim repeated, more indignant than ever. "Well, if that doesn't bate any thing that ever I heerd on. Why, if it war' a cat now, or a dog even, it would be makin' too much shindey about it; but a doll!"

Where was the harrum I wondher, 'specially if
as most likely it war' your own."

"No, but it's not mine though," replied the
child. "It belongs to the master."

"Faix! and it's a quare sort o' masther he
must be, to be havin' sich a plaything as that,"
said Jim his bewilderment increasing at each
word she uttered. "And tell me, acchora, did
you break the dolly, or what did you do, that
he made sich a rumpus about it?"

"Break the doll? Oh, no, I am not nearly
strong enough for that," said Aileen, evidently
half-smiling at the very notion."

"Then what did you do?"

"I rung the bell."

"Rung the bell? A grate idaya entirely.
You rung the bell; and what then, alannah?"

"Then, don't you see, the master put me in
here to make me do better next time."

"Ayan! God mark us all to grace," cried Jim,
"if I don't think you must be all gone stark
starin' mad together, and myself may be the
same as well, for only listenin' to such folly. But
tell me, darlint—"

What Jim was going to ask Aileen, however, was never destined to be known, for in the midst of his speech the door was unlocked and opened, and a man, whom the shrinking Aileen announced in a hurried whisper as "the very master," whose dollish partialities they had just been so freely discussing, approached them with a candle, which he flourished nearly in their faces, probably with a view to ascertain which of his hopeful pupils had dared to associate themselves so intimately with the captive.

A pale-faced, bloated-looking man he was, as Jim gazed upon him in that murky light, and with a look of cruel roguery in his eyes which made him seem quite a different sort of ruffian from the jolly Dick, or the sad-eyed, ruthless-looking Nightshade.

"Wot, you ain't becomed chums already, ain't you though?" he commenced, in a voice that corresponded indifferently well with the vile expression of his countenance. "But I might have guessed it, I might, if birds of a feather flock together, as the knowing ones say they do. Howsomever, you must cut your luckie now,

Miss Aileen, for I carn't let you in here a corruptin' of new comers. So cut off at once, I say, will ye, if you doan't want strap sarce for your supper to-night."

"Yerra, but you wouldn't sure, sir, to a bit of a thing like that?" cried Jim, forgetful of his own safety in anxiety for that of his little companion, who had sprung at least two yards from him on the first entrance of the master.

"Wouldn't I though," said the ruffian coarsely. "She'd better not try it, that's all, for if she ain't got it as yet, that's no sort of region, but quite the contrary, why she shouldn't have a taste of it in future. So cut off at once, young missus, if you vally that ere white skin o' yours at any thing like a regionable hestimation."

Thus admonished, the little girl moved towards the door, but just as she was passing through it she turned once more towards Jim, and lifted her hand with a gesture of encouragement ere she vanished down the passage. After her departure "the master" satisfied his feelings by administering an odd kick or two to his prisoner as a sort of admonishment for the future, and

then carrying the candle with him departed also, leaving the boy to take what repose he might upon the floor of the rat peopled cellar ; nor will it, we trust, considering the circumstances of the case, be considered an imputation on his courage if we add, that after hours of weary wakefulness and sorrow Jim fairly cried himself to sleep at last.

CHAPTER XI.

JIM's first thoughts on waking the following morning naturally led him to conclude that he was still in his mother's garret, but one glance round the cellar, where only a dim twilight ever reigned, however high the sun might be in the heavens without, sufficed to relieve him of this blest illusion, and he hid his face in his hands to stifle the sob of agony that was rising to his lips. Even the poor indulgence of tears, however, was destined to be denied him, for the door of his dungeon was suddenly unlocked, and the coarse face of "the master" appeared on the

threshold, bidding him in no very gentle accents to get up and follow him.

At this peremptory summons the boy instantly leaped to his feet, but even as he hurried to the door he could not help muttering to himself, "I wonder now if I mightn't ask him to let me stop for a minute to say a mouthful of prayers?"

"Prayers!" scoffed the master, catching the words as it fell from his lips; "keep 'em to curl your hair, my fine fellar. We doan't patronize such shuperstitious practices in this 'ere bul'ark of British hindependance, so follow me at once and say no more about it, if you doan't want to put your shoulders to a ill-conwenience as prayer ain't hardly doctor enough to plaster."

Thus curtly admonished, Jim followed his conductor to the kitchen, where the visitors of the preceding evening had carried on their carouse, as the stale vapour of gin, brandy, and tobacco, and other as enticing odours which filled the atmosphere from floor to ceiling, sufficiently attested. Even now, early as it was, there were men and women too, commencing the day by potations of their favorite liquids, though some,

chiefly of the younger members of this strange community, were preparing for themselves a morning meal, composed of somewhat less objectionable materials. One glance, however, was as much as Jim could spare to these, for almost at the instant of his entrance, his whole soul became riveted upon the tall figure of a man who was standing with his back to the door by which he had just entered. Not that the individual in question was particularly well dressed, even to the uncritical eyes of his present observer; though a silk pocket handkerchief of much more showy pattern and costly material, than the rest of his attire might have seemed to warrant, did stick out daintily enough from the pocket of his coat; It was, however, far less this circumstance than his extreme immobility of look and posture that chiefly excited Jim's curiosity about him. He wore a hat which seemed intended not only to cover his head, but to rest most curiously upon his shoulders also, nor could all the noise and clatter going on about him induce him to look round even once during the long five minutes that Jim remained staring at him. Baffled

at last by this excessive stillness, the boy gave up his scrutiny, to bestow his attention instead upon the breakfast, which one of the women now presented to him, and which, truth to say, was a great improvement, both as to quantity and quality upon his home allowance. While he was discussing it, he looked anxiously around, in hopes of discovering some one who might answer to his preconceived idea of his little visitor of the night before. There was nothing, however, in the scrubby-heads, and over-sharp, intelligent looking faces near him which by any effort of imagination he could associate with his visionary image of Aileen, and he had nearly given up all hopes of meeting her again, at least, in the public kitchen of the house, when a momentary swaying of the little crowd enabled him to catch a glimpse of her at last, seated upon a low settle, alone and apparently self-withdrawn from all the other occupants of the place. There is a story of a fairy, who for some transgression of the laws of fairy-dom, was sentenced by her elvish peers to lose the brightness of her exterior beauty, to

dismount from the pretty butterfly, which erst had carried her joyfully through the fields of air, and with chains on her delicate arms, and a sombre robe flung round her fragile form, to wander a captive on a slow moving moth. Jim, of course, had never even heard the tale, nor was it very likely that in his hard work-a-day life he had ever formed to himself any very clear idea of a fairy or her privileges; but if he had done so, the recollection of the poor little disgraced Rivuletta would certainly have flashed across him as he gazed that morning on Aileen. Even the coarse rags in which they had wrapped her could not conceal the natural refinement of her beauty, and as she sat there upon a low stool raised only a few inches from the floor, her head resting listlessly on her little hand, and her bright hair, (which luckily it had never occurred to her present possessors to cut off,) falling smoothly, but otherwise totally disarranged upon her shoulders, he felt instinctively that she was not more elevated in feeling and appearance above her present associates than in social condition also.

Possibly Aileen, on her part also, already comprehended that the boy whom she had visited in his prison the night before was, if of equally low parentage with those around him, still very different from them by habit and education; for even as he was gazing on her, longing, yet not daring to approach, she lifted her eyes suddenly to his face, suffered them to rest for a moment wistfully upon him, and then, as if fearful of being discovered, dropped them as suddenly on the floor again. The delighted Jim would have rushed over to her at once, but something in her manner seemed to intimate that it would be dangerous to do so. He therefore contented himself with watching her drooping, fragile little figure, until at a signal from the "master" the knot of boys, by whom they had hitherto been separated from each other, moved off to that part of the kitchen where the incomprehensible old gentleman was still standing like a statue. This was too good an opportunity to be neglected, and Jim took advantage of it to get nearer and nearer to the little girl, until he managed to establish himself at last on a bench at a few yards distance.

She however, neither looked up nor spoke even then, so he did not venture to address her, and employed himself instead in watching the boys at the other end of the room, in hopes of learning from the nature of their present occupation, what would be expected of him by the future controllers of his destiny.

We have said that he was quick witted and intelligent enough when the effects of past disease did not obscure his ideas, but no amount of sharpness which Jim had ever been possessed of, could have enabled him to interpret without assistance the nature of the scene before him now. One of the boys, singled out by the master for the purpose, walked leisurely up to the patient old gentleman, amid the encouragement of his companions, some of whom even betted loudly on his chances of success. What that chance might be, or what the nature of the result expected, Jim felt it to be absolutely impossible to guess, so he waited and watched with his mouth and eyes wide open, until the young adventurer cautiously applying his hand to the pocket of the patient, was in the act of drawing forth the

identical silk handkerchief which we have noticed before—when—the old gentleman started—not a bit of it—he remained as passive as before, but a small bell which he carried somewhere about him rung, and evidently considering himself defeated, the boy retired at once amid the jeers of those who had before betted on his skill. Another and another followed, each with a similar want of success, and far from arriving at any rational interpretation of the scene before him, Jim was growing each moment more absorbed in wonder, less perhaps at the conduct of the boys, than at the extraordinary equanimity of their passive victim, when he felt a soft little hand put into his, and heard a soft little voice whisper quietly in his ear :

“ Don’t look at me, good boy, but listen, for I don’t want these people to think we are talking together.”

“ Don’t look,” thought Jim, “ think o’ that now, the cuteness of the crayture !”

But he only answered in a voice as cautiously pitched as her own :

"Spake up, Miss, if you plaize, I'm a listenin' wid all my ears."

"Don't call me Miss," replied the child, "my name is Aileen, at least it is Aileen here."

"Well, Aileen, I'm a listenin', darlint, but afore you begin, acushla, may be you'd jist tell me who the ould gentleman beyant is, and why he stands up so quiet, while them thieves of the worruld do be pickin' his pocket. Sure if he had any sinse at all at all, he'd jist make one dart in on them and sind them flying like magpies, instead of pullin' that bit of a bell that barely scares them away for a moment."

A smothered laugh from his little friend here caused him to stop short, and while he was still feeling rather ashamed of the ignorance which he felt he had somehow betrayed, Aileen questioned in her turn:

"Why you don't mean to say you think he's alive?"

"Ah, thin, and why wouldn't I, dear?" replied Jim, "sure what's to hinder him?"

"Not much, certainly," observed the little

girl trying to look grave, "only that he's made of wood, that's all."

"Made of wood, upon your honour now, Aileen? Do tell me what is he at all, at all, bad luck to him, what is he?"

"Why the doll to be sure; the master teaches them on that. But oh, Jim, isn't that what they call you;" and Jim nodding his head she went on, "don't you ever learn, Jim, or let him teach you, for you will become a bad boy the very instant that you do."

"Well you must know best to be shure, acush-la," he answered after a little consideration; "but if there's little sinse there's still less harrum to my poor thinking, in stalin' a handkerchief from a man of straw, an no great fun neither for the matter of that, if it warn't for the ringing of that jolly little bell."

"There is harm, and great harm too," responded his self elected little monitress, "for as soon as you are clever enough to get the handkerchief out of his pocket without ringing the bell, you will be sent out into the streets, and if you don't bring back ever so many handkerchiefs

every night to the master, he'll beat you like anything."

"Musha, then, and where is a poor gorsoon like me for to get them?" groaned Jim, feeling as if he were becoming more thick-skulled and bewildered at every syllable uttered by the other. "Such things don't grow in the streets, avourneen, like black-berries in the hedges, do they? Leastways if they do, I've never had the luck to find them."

"That's just it," said Aileen, eagerly; "they must be all stolen pocket handkerchiefs—mind that, Jim. Stolen out of the pockets of the people in the street."

"To think of that now," cried Jim. "Well, thin, accushla, for as often as I hard tell of pick-pockets in London, I niver knew afore this blessid instant, that it was taught for all the world like reading, writing, cyphering, and arithmitic. May I never sin, Miss Aileen, if I wouldn't like to thry my hand on the ould gantleman myself. It would be rare fun, wouldn't it for to bate them omadhauns at their own trade, as I'm almost sure and sartain that I could."

"Oh, but you mustn't, Jim. You mustn't indeed," pleaded Aileen, earnestly. "If once you want to succeed, you will go on without knowing it, until you become a thief like the rest,—that boy yonder with the black hair did, he told me so himself; and sometimes he is sorry for it even now, Jim; dear Jim, promise me that you will not even try to succeed—"

"And get strap sauce for my pains, as that oaf did just now," replied Jim. "Sure you wouldn't like to stand by and see me wallopped like that, would you, acushla?"

"No! No!" replied Aileen, affectionately. "Yet even that would not be so bad as the other. Hush, Jim, they are calling for you. Now promise me—won't you promise me that you will not even try to do it?"

"Troth it would be a grate thing entirely that I wouldn't promise for to plaize you," replied Jim, tightly grasping the little hand that had been put imploringly into his. "So here goes, for the masther is callin' in good airnest."

Aileen hid her face in her hands, for she could not bear to see that which she knew would be

the result of her own interference; but Jim, on the contrary, walked boldly and carelessly up to the lay figure and pulled out the handkerchief with so uncompromising a jerk that it rung as if it never intended to stop.

There could be no doubt about its having been done on purpose, and the enraged master instantly rewarded him by a savage blow on the knuckles. Jim, however, had been too well accustomed to this kind of argument on the part of his father to feel either greatly surprised or greatly aggrieved at its being applied to him now, so he merely said, smiling as he returned to his seat by Aileen:

“I’ve you to thank for that blow, Miss Aileen, so anyways I hope you’re continted.”

“Indeed I am very sorry,” Aileen answered in a crying voice. “And yet, anything is better than that you should ever be a thief; but hush, Hurdy-gurdy Bill is going to try his hand, and he’s sure to succeed, for he always does, that’s why he is the master’s pet.”

A moment afterwards and a loud shout announced that the prophecy of the little girl

had been fulfilled, and then the crowd dispersing in various directions, Jim found at last that he and Aileen were the only children remaining in the kitchen. He was just beginning to congratulate himself on this fact, trusting it might aid him in a scheme he was concocting for his own escape and hers, (for to do him justice from the moment she had given him to understand that she also was an unwilling captive he had so associated her sorrows with his own, that had freedom been offered him then without her, he could hardly have prevailed on himself to leave her;) when the master very unceremoniously took him by the arm and re-conducted him to his former prison. Into this he was forthwith locked and bolted, after having been given to understand, that if he remained quiet during the day, he would be let out again at the hour when the other inhabitants of the mansion usually returned for the night. We will pass over the history of the long hours that ensued, happily a portion of them (notwithstanding the loud warfare which the rats by day as well as by night carried on among themselves) were passed in slumber, the result at once

of weariness and sorrow, and it was from such a state of blest forgetfulness that he was roused towards night-fall, to be re-conducted to the kitchen where he had breakfasted in the morning.

Most of the boys whom he had seen there then were again assembled, and the remainder were dropping rapidly in, while Aileen, whom his eager eye sought out directly, was seated on the same low stool where he had first beheld her, and so nearly in the same place and attitude, that he could almost have persuaded himself she had not stirred since morning. And now began a scene which filled Jim with new wonder and dismay, notwithstanding the hint previously given him by Aileen.

Each boy on his entrance presented himself before the master, and was disburthened by that functionary of whatever valuables he had been enabled to pick up in the course of his daily toil. Infinite and very curious in its way was the variety of articles thus presented to the public gaze; pocket handkerchiefs being evidently the staple commodity, interspersed, however, and en-

livened by scarfs, keys, ladies' combs, tooth pick cases, purses (none apparently containing any great amount of cash), chains, and lockets. Every boy was commended and rewarded in exact proportion to the value and quantity of the merchandise he had brought in, and this was done with so just an appreciation of the merits of each little individual of the thievish gang, that had Jim been as learned in proverbs as Sancho Panza, that of "honour among thieves" would certainly have occurred to his mind.

At last when every individual present had passed through this ordeal, and a heap of all sorts of miscellaneous trumpery lay on the floor beside him, the master suddenly discovered that one member of the community was still absent, and eagerly enquired after Hurdy-Gurdy Bill.

"He'll be here in a flash of lightning," said one of the boys, "I seed him an hour agone, at the corner of Fleet Street, a playing and singing to a lot of old leddies, and it will be very unlike he indeed, if he don't bring back summut 'and-some for a keepsake from one of 'em."

Even as he pronounced this opinion, which

seemed to be very generally that of his companions also, the cracked notes of a hurdy gurdy became audible from the passage, and in danced the boy in question. He was playing with all his might, and accompanying his instrumental music with a song, the burthen of which, being a mixture of bad English and worse Italian, he had always found particularly effective with that class of London citizens, who to a general sympathy with Italian boys, unite no very clear conception of their language.

“ Ah, Signora, ah, Signora,
Da mi, da mi,
A halfe pennie, a halfe pennie,
Povero mi, povero mi,
Sing, dance for a halfe pennie.”

A burst of applause greeted this effort of genius, and amid the cheers and laughs of all beholders, Bill danced, still playing on his instrument up to the master, and never ceasing for a moment the exercise of both voice and hand, commenced disgorging his pockets of their ill-gotten plunder. Hardly half a dozen of the other lads had collected as much between them,

as now came forth from his pockets alone, and after a vast variety of articles had been added to those already piled on the floor, Bill drew forth in triumph a purse, which was found upon inspection to contain a considerable quantity of gold and silver.

"Won't they have it cried, that's all," cried the master exultingly, placing it among the less ponderous, but more valuable portion of the booty as soon as he had ascertained its contents.

Bill, however, feeling naturally unwilling to be so entirely deprived of the fruits of his ingenuity as this disposition on the part of the master appeared to betoken, held out one imploring hand, after the manner of Italian boys, and grinding away furiously on his instrument with the other, hopped about in a sort of mad savage dance to the burthen of his favourite composition, "da mi, da mi."

"No, hang it all, old fellar," he broke off in his song to say, as the master tendered him a five shilling piece, "silver's cheap and confoundedly low, let it be gold this time; you owes it to

me you do, for there ain't hardly a week I don't bring it into your coffers."

"Gold let it be then," said the other, substituting a half sovereign for the silver, "for I likes to encourage genous, and you are the sharpest hand out and out on a lay that I have in the school, I will say that for you, Bill, and I ain't a one to flatter without reason, as I 'opes every lady and gemman present are by this time well convinced of."

The ladies and gentlemen thus addressed immediately responded to the call by an approving cheer, and then Bill made his acknowledgment for the compliment addressed to himself by pathetically observing that "it were werry pleasant to a cove it were, to have his merit recognised by so excellent a judge, as the gent who presided at the head of their academy." After this, he backed himself dexterously out of the crowd towards the spot where Aileen and Jim were sitting together, and having unbuckled his instrument, and otherwise prepared to make himself comfortable for the evening, he sat down

by the little girl and presented her with six-pence, saying :

“ Now, little queen, you ain’t a got a single blessid copper since you’ve been in our establishment, so here goes for a crooked sixpence to buy lollipops or anything else that you may happen to fancy.”

“ Thank you,” said Aileen quietly; “ but I don’t want lollipops, nor money either.”

“ But if you don’t now, you may sometime else you know,” persisted the lad, who was fond of Aileen, and pitied her, as the prettiest and most unsuitable inmate that the tramp-house could boast of.

“ And if I did,” she replied, fixing her blue eyes reproachfully upon him, “ I wouldn’t be a thief to get it. No! not for all the lollipops in the world, Mr. Bill.”

The other laughed. A jolly unabashed laugh, which told as plainly as if he had spoken the words, that he considered this speech to be merely the result of prejudices inherent in the education of a weak minded little girl.

“ Well, then, little queen,” he went on as soon

as he had conquered this paroxysm of mirth, "I'll keep the money, shall I, until next time I goes a shopping, and then I'll buy you the goods myself? You can take them with a clear conscience that way, you know, for you never can be expected to guess where they comes from."

"You needn't buy them, for I won't take them," answered Aileen. "It would be just as bad to let you buy them as to do so myself."

"As your leddyship pleases," he responded with unfailing good humour. "This 'ere cove as is a listening with his tooth-box wide open is of the same methody way of thinking I conclude, judging at least by the approving bob of that werry large and magnificent head which he's got set on his shoulders."

"For sartin," replied Jim, stoutly — more stoutly, perhaps, than he would have dared to attempt, if he had not been addressed in that tone of contemptuous raillery which is so grievously irritating to a sensitive mind,— "Myself doesn't very well know what you mane by a tooth-box," (here Bill pointed to his

mouth with so ridiculous an imitation of his look of astonishment that even Aileen could not refrain from smiling) "but I do know what thief and thieving manes well enough, and I'd as lief take stolen money as stolen goods, any day in the year I would, for sure isn't one for all the world every bit as much of a robbery as the other?"

"No, would you though," Bill answered in his mocking manner, "in that case you'd better make up your mind to a precious sight o' strappin' during your residence with we, my fine fellar; for it's aginst our principles to let such hinnocent 'onesty as yours to live quietly among us."

"Troth, likely enough," Jim promptly answered, "but in that case, Mister Bill, p'raps you wouldn't object to its showin' you a clane pair of heels altogether."

"I'd like to see the cove that did it though," retorted Bill, "first and foremost it ain't no sich easy job to get clear out of this part of the city at all, 'specially if you haven't had the good fortin of being brought up in the wicinity, and I've knowed more nor one cove, arter trampin'

back'ards and for'ards for hours together, pull up at last at the werry same door that he'd set off from in the morning. Adding to which, (he continued,) the streets hereabouts are all watched by our palls, and if you *did* escape from them (wich isn't to say likely), you'd be sartain to fall in with the traps instead, who having an unjust idear that a tramp'ouse is only a polite hepithet for a den of thieves, treat every one as they thinks is come from it accordin'."

" So any ways there's no use trying to get clear out of the place (bad luck to it), at all," Jim answered with a groan, which had his life depended on it, he could not at that moment have repressed.

" Therefore, all you've got for it, is to make yourself at home since you're in it," Bill very seriously and impressively responded, " that's wot I did when I com'd in first, and now I wouldn't change the sitivation for a kingdom."

" And I wouldn't keep it for two," cried the indignant Jim, " so you needn't try to persuade me, Misther Bill; honesty is the best policy in the end, mother always says so."

To this observation Bill seriously replied by enquiring if his mother knew he was out, applying at the same time his finger to his nose after a manner well known already, no doubt, to most of our readers.

"No, she don't then," Jim answered, as he laid his burning brow upon the table, and answered in the perplexity of his grief to the literal rather than the figurative part of the question. "But oh, wirra wirra, don't I wish that she did though, for sure it's not long I'd be here, if she only knew I was in it."

A burst of tears followed this speech, which Bill, however, did not wait to witness, for feeling rather fatigued after the labours of the day, he walked quietly off to bed.

A long silence followed, broken only by the sobs of the unhappy boy, but at last unable to see his grief without at least attempting to console him, Aileen put her soft little hand in his and whispered earnestly :

"Don't cry so, dear Jim, only be good and honest, and God will surely send some one to help us—"

Suddenly she broke off, for a hand in turn was laid upon her shoulder, and a voice tremulous with emotion asked :

“ Do you think He has sent me, birdeen ? ”

And Aileen was instantly in the arms of Esther.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. SUTHERLAND was in his study, one arm resting in a sling, the other supporting his head in an attitude of deep thought when a servant entered to announce a "lady who wished to speak to him in private."

"Send her to Miss de Burghe," he impatiently replied. "What have I do with ladies? Will that fellow never bring the brougham? I ought to have been in the city an hour ago."

Hardly, however, had the words passed his lips ere some other thought seemed to strike him, and he added quickly:

"But stay—no need to trouble Miss de Burghe

about it. I have ten minutes still to spare and will see her in here myself."

The servant departed on his mission, and Mr. Sutherland armed himself with a book, in the contents of which he was, or affected to be, so entirely absorbed, that even when the door again unclosed for the admission of a lady in deep mourning, he did not appear to be immediately aware of her presence.

But at last came that question which albeit he expected, and was prepared for it, he could not hear without an involuntary quickening of the pulse.

"Mr. Sutherland, I have come to ask you for my child."

"Madame!" he replied, answering as he had been addressed, in French, and throwing a certain air of astonishment into his manner. "Is she no longer with you?"

"Oh, sir," cried Madame de St. Arnoul, springing suddenly to his side and speaking in a voice of terrible bewilderment. "Do not say—for the love of the good God above us, do not say that you know nought about her!"

"And, alas! Madame, what else can I say? or how find words to explain to you, that in that terrible moment—"

"Aye," she added approaching, her face close to his, and gazing on him with eyes that seemed literally burning in their fierce excitement, "In that terrible moment, aye—"

"In that terrible moment," pursued Mr. Sutherland, "when you were torn from me by the crowd, she also—"

"Oh, do not say it—do not say it!" the mother uttered with a cry of agony that might have softened a tiger's heart.

"But what else can I say?" he asked, in what might have passed for a tone of affectionate perplexity.

Madame de St. Arnoul made no reply, and after a pause, broken only by the suppressed weeping of the mother, he again went on:

"I thought, or at least, I hoped that as you had both disappeared at the same moment, you had not been separated from each other. It appears I was mistaken; unhappily indeed," he

added after another pause of most ominous import; "for a child, in such a crowd—I cannot conceal from you, Madame that it is difficult not to expect the worst."

He was interrupted again by a fearful shriek—the cry of a mother's breaking heart.

"Oh, sir, do not say it; do not say it. Suffer me to hope on still! I had some hope before I saw you. Do not take it utterly away. Do not steel your heart entirely against me. You have children of your own, think what it is to suffer on their account."

"Aye, Madame," he responded shortly, and with a look of such vindictive meaning that it seemed to freeze her very life blood. "You do well to remind me. A scamp and a cripple. It is a desirable paternity in truth!"

"Oh, I know now that I was very cruel," she answered in a voice of real sorrow. "But remember I was maddened by your insults when I said it. Forgive me, I beseech you, and if you know aught of my unhappy child, have pity upon me and tell me!"

"What can I tell you," he asked in the same icy tone that before had chilled her, "or admitting that I can, why should I?"

"The world, sir, will say you should," she impetuously replied.

"Aye, madame," he answered coldly, "but first you must prove to the world that I can."

Madame de St. Arnoul passed her hand over her brow like one in a dream—

"Prove!" she answered vaguely, "I don't want to prove anything, there's nothing to prove that I know of."

Mr. Sutherland watched her from beneath his half closed eyelids and saw that his game was a sure one.

Impetuous by turns, and languid as her eastern habits and natural character had combined to make her, timid as a child and nearly as ignorant as one, of any world outside the little one in which she had moved in India; scarcely understanding English, and utterly unable to speak it, the young creole was in truth a mere plaything in the hands of such a man as he was, hard hearted by nature, heart hardened by occupa-

tion, and therefore ready and willing to play any game, however desperate, for that which he valued above gold, the conservation of his fair name in the opinion of the world.

"I have already told you, Madame," he observed, with a greater show of interest than he had hitherto displayed, "I have already explained to you that you were both separated from me at the same moment, and this sling," he added glancing slightly at his supported arm, "might suffice to convince you that I also did not escape scathless in the affray. But remember your child was lost in Paris, not in London, and, therefore if I might advise, it would be to seek her where you lost her, that is to say in Paris."

Madame de St. Arnoul was about to speak, but suddenly checking herself, she flung herself at his feet instead, exclaiming:

"Oh, wherever she is, or whatever has befallen her, will you not help me at all events to seek her? Sir, by all your hopes of heaven and earth, I beseech you to pardon and assist me. Nay, I will not rise," she added, clinging to him all the more desperately that he tried to release

himself from her grasp, “I will not rise, I will cling to you till I die, if you do not promise to assist me. Perhaps she is dead you will tell me, but it is not her death I fear the most. No, my God, my God! it is a thousand times worse to feel that she may be living yet among those who will teach her evil. Mr. Sutherland, Mr. Sutherland, can you not understand that it is madness even to think of my innocent Rosalie, as she was when I saw her last, and as she may be when I behold her next.”

“I hardly know why you should look to me for pity, in such a case,” he answered, and again there was that peculiar inflexion in his voice, which had made her pulse stand still before. “You have reminded me before now of my domestic troubles, and I marvel that you should expect me to have sympathy with yours.”

“Oh, it is for that very reason,” she answered with another irrepressible burst of anguish, “it is for that very reason that I look to you so confidently for it. You too have children--and you know something of a parent’s love—something of the yearnings of a parent’s bosom— something of

the way in which heart, and soul, and happiness, and life itself, are all bound up in the well-being of a child we dote on. Something you know, too," she added after a moment's hesitation, "of our feelings when they fail us—but oh, even you cannot tell, because you are not a mother, and you have no daughter, even you can never guess the anguish with which I contemplate the possible fate of Rosalie."

Her passionate accents actually filled the room they sat in, and Mr. Sutherland grew pale; but not from fear, or feeling for her. Very different from the sentiment which she had intended to produce, was that which now blanched his brow and made his lip to quiver, as in hoarse accents he exclaimed :

"Do I not know? do I not know? oh, woman, woman! does then a father care nothing for his son—the being on whom he has set his hopes—the creature for whom he has toiled incessantly from youth to age, the one sole object of his thoughts and aspirations. Do I not know? do I not know? Have I not seen him plunge from the pinnacle where I would have set him, to

become the associates of—of—oh, trust me, woman, all the sighs and tears and hysterical complaints of one of your weak-minded sex is not equal to that one strong pang of agony, which breaks a father's heart even while it forces him to silence."

There was in truth an expression of agony in his voice and eyes, as for a moment he glared on her, that no power of language could possibly have conveyed. Struck with remorse and shame for the taunt she had once flung at him in her passion, Madame de St Arnoul bowed her head upon his hand exclaiming :

" Believe me, I never even dreamed of such a sorrow, pardon me that I insulted it; I know it was very wrong, very wicked—more fearfully wicked even than I ever conceived it till this moment."

" And in return for that fearful wrong," he replied shaking her hand from him as he would have done a reptile, "in return for that burning wrong, that wanton insult, you would have me try to save your child from the doom you made

mockery of in mine. I know not the man who would do it, Madame."

"None but a christian could," she answered humbly, "and it is to you as a christian that I appeal."

"And as a christian you shall be answered," he replied, a sneer of mockery on his lip. "Nay," he continued, again withdrawing the hand which she would have pressed rapturously to her lips, "before you express any gratitude, it is fitting we should understand one another, and I will be very plain. Whatever I once thought of you, I think that still; however I once hated you, I hate you still; the insult you once flung upon me rankles still, and the stain which I believe to be on your life, never to my mind can be effaced from thence. Nevertheless, whatever else you are, you are the mother of that child and you have lost her; and therefore, but for that reason only, I cannot refuse my aid to find her; though mark me well, Madame, I give it to you neither as a relation, nor yet a friend, but as a christian only."

The cheek of Madame de St. Arnoul had flushed to crimson and her eyes had been raised in indignant denial many times before this cold blooded speech was ended, but she did not otherwise attempt to interrupt it. Even after he had ceased to speak, and the hard, cruel tones which had pronounced with such supreme indifference, on everything most sacred to her feelings as a wife and a mother, no longer vibrated on her ear, she stood rooted to the spot, repressing by a strong effort her vehement desire to retort passionately upon her assailant. For though the quivering lip was bitten till the blood came, and the delicate fingers were twisted together until it seemed as if they must infallibly have been crushed, still the mother triumphed above the woman; and conscious that she could hope for his aid upon no other terms, Madame de St. Aruoul stooped to accept it upon those he offered.

“Sign this then,” said Mr. Sutherland as soon as she had expressed her readiness to obey him, and pushed towards her a piece of paper on which he had written a few lines.

Madame de St. Arnoul cast her eye across them.

"No, sir," she cried, her passion once more rising as she perceived their purport, "that is a confession of my own disgrace which I do not acknowledge and will never sign. I will put my name to anything purporting to its being *your opinion*," she added softening as she remembered her lost child. "But not even to save Rosalie will I consent to anything which would make so foul a falsehood seem an avowal of my own."

Mr. Sutherland took the paper, and by the alteration of a few words, contrived to give it the significance she preferred its bearing. Then she wrote her name below with a hand so trembling in passionate anger as to be almost illegible.

"You must write it plainer," he observed, as he looked over her shoulder, "no one on earth could prove to such a signature as that is. Dip your hand in that glass of cold water, if it trembles,—and here is a better pen."

His victim received the pen in silence, and

refusing by a shake of the head the water which he proffered, wrote her name once more; this time as it seemed with better success, for Mr. Sutherland made no further objection, but taking the paper from her, put it triumphantly in his desk. He felt in fact that he had achieved a double victory. If ever suspicion should fall upon him for the loss of Rosalie, that paper proving that he had been actually engaged in her search would go far to clear him; but if, on the other hand, by any mischance, she escaped him, and he were forced as a last resource to dispute her legitimacy, it would show at any rate that Madame de St. Arnoul had accepted his services at a time when he positively denied her own right, and her child's to the name they bore.

Nothing of this interior triumph, however, did he allow to be visible on his countenance, as with a greater manifestation of interest in the business than he had hitherto thought proper to display, he forced his unwilling guest to a chair beside him, and went on:

"And now, Madame, I must reiterate my

first opinion, that you are destroying every chance of recovering your child by remaining here. It really seems nothing short of madness to me if you ever entertained an idea that I brought her over with me; you must surely, by this time, be convinced that you were mistaken; for, on the contrary, I am still something of an invalid from the injuries I received in endeavouring to rescue her. Yes," he added, observing that Madame de St. Arnoul glanced slightly at his arm, "I was thrown down in the crowd, and carried by some compassionate persons to an hotel, where I was three weeks a prisoner with a broken arm."

"Were they sisters of charity who helped you?" cried Madame de St. Arnoul eagerly, as a mode of discovering the truth of this story, flashed suddenly across her mind.

A wicked gleam in Mr. Sutherland's eye might have warned her, if she knew how to read its language, that he was far too cunning to put her in possession even of so slight a clue as this; nevertheless he answered simply, and as if no idea of her intention had crossed his mind;

"No, Madame! My good samaritans were of the national guard, and as they never returned to the hotel, I can only conjecture that they were of the number of those appointed by the provisional government to the duty of removing the wounded—they took a list of whatever valuables I had about me, and gave it, with the articles themselves, into the care of my landlord, until such a time as I should be capable of claiming them for myself."

This story was very plausible in itself, and still more plausibly related. If anything, perhaps, it was a trifle too circumstantial; but this was not likely to occur to Madame de St. Arnoul at the moment, listening, as she did, in an agony of tears. She could only acknowledge to herself that the information upon which she had come to England must have been erroneous, and her heart died within her as she did so. If Mr. Sutherland indeed spoke truth, where was her little Rosa now? No wonder she shuddered visibly as that gentleman resumed:—

"I quitted Paris as soon as I could crawl, for I had not been able to communicate with my family

in the meantime, and I knew how uneasy they must have been about me. I confess," he added with the air of one frankly acknowledging a fault, "I did not again seek to find you. It was wrong I know, but I had neither bodily strength or influence; and, besides, the landlord of the hotel where I was staying, assured me it would be useless. If you had unfortunately perished, you would, he said, have been already buried with the other victims of the revolution, and if you were living, still there could be no doubt of your being in safety, as the provisional government had fully succeeded in providing for the security of all, whether native or alien who resided in the city."

"Where, then is my Rosa, now?" murmured the poor mother, laying her head upon the table, as if utterly unable to bear up any longer against a weight of evidence, which tended so strongly to show that her child was still in Paris; and, perhaps, the inhabitant of its most vicious places.

"Where is she?" repeated Mr. Sutherland, with a good affectation of the energy of impatience. "If she be yet alive, Madame, of course, she is

in Paris, and probably in the very quarter where we lost her; a position full of danger for the present, and evil for the future. Surely it is needless to suggest to you that if you would find her, you must go there to seek her. Nay, this duty stares you in the face, and, fortunately, I can aid you to accomplish it, for one of my correspondents is a dear friend of the Minister of the Interior. I will give you a letter to his address, and request him to procure you every assistance and encouragement in his power."

This plan seemed so rational, and there was so much apparent good faith in the way it was suggested, that for a brief instant, Madame de St. Arnoul believed; and lifting up her head, eagerly exclaimed:

"Give me the letter, and I will go back at once. I will do anything you bid me!"

Mr. Sutherland instantly wrote a short note, which he gave to her to read before folding into an envelope.

"One question more," he added, as she placed it in her reticule, "Madame has money for the journey?"

"If I had not," she answered, passion once more getting the better of prudence, "If I had not, I would beg my way to Paris, sooner than take a farthing from one who has so dishonoured me by his suspicions."

Mr. Sutherland only answered by a bow, and the offer of an arm to lead her to her carriage.

"Remember," he added, as he pushed aside his servants to put her into the cab himself, "Remember your best chance is speed. There is a train to Folkestone this afternoon. You cannot do better than to start at once. Will you do so; and where shall I tell him to drive to now?"

"I will," she answered. "But I must go first to the Sabloniére to pack up my things."

"To the Sabloniére," he shouted, and closed the door.

The unhappy mother sank back in an agony of doubt and fear in the carriage, while he returned to his study with a sense of wicked triumph in his heart, such as even Mephistophiles himself might have envied.

"Aye, go your ways, Madame," he muttered.

“ You taunted me once with the misfortunes of my household, go you now and sit desolate in your own. Search if you will in the haunts of iniquity where you child is no longer a stranger, but a companion. Search, if you will, and find her with oaths on her childish lips, and the germs of intemperance in her young blue eyes: and if in that hour of your mother’s woe you remember the taunt you once flung on my boy, believe (for you may) that Heaven has avenged it.”

CHAPTER XIII.

ON the morning that Madame de St. Arnoul paid her visit to Mr. Sutherland, Evelyn de Burghe was seated in the room in which we first introduced her to our readers. Though she appeared to be occupied with a book, her dark eye glanced occasionally towards the door, in a way that showed she was expecting some one. She had some time to wait, however; but at last Frank Montgomerie made his appearance, and seating himself at the table, leaned his head upon his hand disconsolately, and in silence.

“ Well,” asked Evelyn, after waiting a moment

or two, to see if he would speak. "Have you been talking to Mr. Sutherland?"

"I have," was the curt reply.

"And what does he say? Has he heard nothing of Frederick?"

"He says not—and what's more, he won't enquire."

"Won't enquire!"

"By the police—the only real channel for obtaining information. He shrinks from every thing calculated to lead to the disgrace of public exposure; and to say truth I cannot blame him."

"Disgrace!" repeated Evelyn, indignantly. "Good God! what is disgrace compared to the ruin or rescue of this unhappy boy?"

"Disgrace!" repeated Frank, in a very different tone. "Disgrace, let me tell you, Evelyn, is a bitter thing enough to bear at any time, but most so when it falls on a father's name through the misdeeds of his son."

"Bitter enough, God knows, Frank! I do not want to say it is not; but still I cannot weigh it with the chances of restoring poor Fred to virtue."

"Virtue! my dear Evelyn. He is beyond all chance of that restoration now."

"You think so?"

"Nay, I am certain. Has he not given the coloring to his life; and how shall we efface the dye? Oh, Frederick, Frederick!" he groaned, rather speaking his own thoughts aloud than addressing them to his companion, "Who could have dreamed that with so much of noble in your nature, you ever would have stooped so low?"

"And oh, Frank! Frank!" cried Evelyn in a voice of ill-repressed impatience, "What else could be expected from a boy who, with strong passions, and brilliant talents, was left to grow up without one such idea of the necessity of watching over his human nature, one such thought of diffiding in his own human judgment, as only the humility of religion can bestow?"

"For humility read baseness, and all is said," Frank answered, with some asperity. "True, Evelyn, I did not teach him that abject deference for the opinions of any set of men, which you call religion. I did not seek to terrify his mind by threats of a judgment which exists only in

the dreams of women and young children, or try to sway him to deeds of virtue by visions of a future bliss, which I not only do not believe will ever be their guerdon, but which, if it were, would deprive them of all real grandeur by making them originate in self. I did not do all this indeed, because conscientiously I could not; but all that a true and honest man could do, I did. I set before him the beauty of the moral law, and the sublime position of the man who tramples upon his coarser passions to walk steadily by its dictates; and for this same reason I cultivated his intellect to the utmost; hoping thus to give him such a taste for higher things, as would lift him from the lowest to the loftiest aspirations of our nature."

"Or, in other words," responded Evelyn, with spirit, "you tried to build a palace without the trifling aid of a foundation, and sought to make him moral, without that comprehension of the necessity of morality which only the recognition of an All-mighty law giver can bestow. You endeavoured to make him trample upon vice without one of those strong motives for the effort

which only such recognition of a law giver can afford; and now, forsooth, you are astonished, because the soul, which you left thus naked and defenceless, has failed in the battle with its own strong passions, and its innocence has suffered shipwreck in the first great tide of temptation that rolled over its path in life!"

"And yet I gave him the training that I gave myself," Frank answered, with a pride he was quite unconscious he was betraying.

"And you would have me believe it was entirely successful in that instance," Evelyn replied, with a little archness in her still sad smile.

"And don't you believe it, Evelyn?"

"Humph! I must consider first," said Evelyn with a wicked smile. "There is such a thing, you know, as compounding—

‘For sins we are inclined to,
By damning those we have no mind to.’"

"What do you mean?" Frank rather testily enquired.

"I mean, that, though you neither drink nor

swear, being too temperate for the one, and too well-bred for the other, nevertheless—”

“Wrong at the very outset,” he interrupted her triumphantly. “I had, when I was very young, a pre-disposition to drink, not of course for its own sake, but for the fun and frolic of the thing; but no sooner did I perceive it, than I made my resolution, and by one strong effort of the will, fulfilled it. You know I never drink anything but water now.”

“Seasoned and made palatable by a strong infusion of red hot pride,” Evelyn laughingly retorted. “But though pride may be *your* ruling passion, and therefore sufficient to keep the rest in check, other men’s minds may be differently constituted, and *their* pet passions less amenable to the laws of propriety than yours.”

“It is not pride, Evelyn, but strength of purpose that keeps *me* straight,” he answered with considerable hauteur.

“Be it so,” said Evelyn; “‘A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.’ Nevertheless, this very pride, or strength of purpose, which

ever you please to call it, that helps you to reject all grosser forms of vice, is very apt to originate another class of sin, not so revolting perhaps to speak of, but quite as inimical as your perfection."

"Indeed, fair saint! and may I enquire what are these hidden dangers in my path?"

"Anger, hatred, implacability, revenge!" said Evelyn, laughing, yet hesitating, as if she felt she was treading upon tender ground.

"A goodly catalogue, truly," he answered, with a laugh which was perhaps not quite genuine. "Are there any other little items you would like to add? You may as well do the thing handsomely while you are about it."

"No," said Evelyn, affecting to consider. "These will be the real rocks for you, and if ever you find yourself among them, then I think you will confess, (for if you are proud you are candid also,) that this poor human nature which we bear about us, needs higher aid in the hour of temptation than any it can receive from a mere intellectual perception of the beauty of the moral law; and stronger restraints than any im-

posed by that very will, which will then be urging it to evil."

"In other words," said Frank, "it needs, you think, the fires of hell, and the golden gates of paradise to deter it from the one path and lure it to the other."

"In other words," said Evelyn, gravely, "it needs that belief in a Higher Power—a Power that having made the law, has clearly a right to enforce it, which is the only motive strong enough to keep human nature everywhere, and at all times, in subjection."

There was a long pause; and then half in doubt, half in scorn, Frank said :

"Evelyn, you have sense and sharpness enough on most points; is it possible you really believe all that trash about eternities, good or bad, awaiting us in the distance?"

"Don't you, Frank?"

"Not I, indeed," he answered with one of those bitter laughs which she hated to hear upon his lips. "We are here: that is the only fact we know,—the rest is mystery. Nevertheless, as I do not admit of sin in the sense in which you

define it, it follows that I regard its future punishment as a myth, which priests have made, that they may rule us at their pleasure."

"But if sin is not sin, why do you turn from it, Frank, and why do you pride yourself on doing so?"

"Because, Evelyn, the formation of my brain inclines me to the intellectual, while in many others it determines them to the animal."

"In that case we are no more responsible for our actions than the animals themselves, and we only falsify our nature when we endeavour to make it reach a higher standard."

"On the contrary," said Frank, "as all animals act according to the capacity of their brain, we are never so true to ours, as when we endeavour to attain to great things."

"And yet," said Evelyn, "if vice and virtue are not facts, but mere ideas, how is it, Frank, that we all are drawn so naturally to admire the one, and dislike the other? and how is it that your own cheek will flush, and your eyes fill up, when you hear of a deed of more than ordinary moral beauty?"

"I was not aware that eye and cheek of mine were so susceptible," he answered laughingly.

"And yet they are!" Evelyn earnestly responded. "Yesterday, for instance, when you came upon that passage of Macauley's about St. Francis Xavier."

"The language was magnificent," Frank rather uneasily observed.

"Oh, do not say so," cried Evelyn. "It was the character unfolded. I know you well, and I am sure the most magnificent language ever lavished on a mere parliamentary debate would never have so stirred you, Frank."

"Well," he answered, laughing. "It was a grand description of a grand character if you will—and had he been educated in the nineteenth century your Francis Xavier might have moved the world."

"That is to say, of course," retorted Evelyn, "always supposing Francis Xavier had had the good sense to square his ideas on those of Frank Montgomerie."

"Just so," he answered, in a tone which for all

its playfulness conveyed a full acceptance of the proposition.

"And you think, then," said Evelyn, reproachfully, "that his life was really in vain. His sacrifice of wealth, honor, talent, and ambition all for naught, and that the Apostle of the Indies lived and labored, suffered and loved for—"

"An old wife's dream," Frank interrupted her to say; yet an expression of involuntary pain crossed his features as he did so.

"And you think," she resumed, with a feeling of sadness which found utterance even in her voice, "you think there was no other world for him who put aside this one so entirely to attain it."

"Evelyn! Evelyn!" cried Frank impatiently, "there is no evidence. Who has ever come back to tell us?"

"Frank! Frank!" cried Evelyn, "is not the evidence within us? How is it we dream of immortality if we are not immortal? Of eternity if there is nothing better for us than time? Surely, surely, the very possession of such ideas

proves the facts towards which they are directed : for the finite never could have conceived the infinite, if that infinite did not really exist, and had not, in some way, incomprehensible to us, impressed its consciousness upon our souls."

" 'Incomprehensible to us!' you may well say that, Evelyn. And yet your people lay down the law about it, and tell us how *this* happened, and how *that* fell out, as if they had been on the spot to see it, and with a short-hand writer, moreover, to send an account of it to the *Times*."

" You are speaking of revelation now," replied Evelyn. " And certainly it seems to me that a God (if you admit one,) would make his existence and intentions known to his creatures by the easiest method possible, and that would have been by revelation. Yet, even without scripture, surely all things beautiful and good — the free air, the bright sun, the glorious earth — are revelations in themselves, and revelations of a God-Creator too. The world is a great miracle as it is, but it would be a greater still if there had been no pre-existent power to make it so."

Frank did not reply; for there was sometimes a mournful music in Evelyn's thoughts which jarred sadly on the settled convictions of his own soul, and made him feel mournful also.

"We love all things good and beautiful and true," she went on softly, finding that he would not answer; "and we do not love them as a portion of our nature, because our nature often opposes itself to them; but we love them, I think, both as part of that which we ourselves have lost by sin, and as an emanation of that Divinity from whence we derive our being. Therefore, almost intuitively, we look up to heaven for the realization of that dream of perfection which is the state of the blessed there, and which will crown us also in the next life if we struggle for it in this one."

"All very good in its way, pretty and poetical, no doubt; but still not argument, but declamation."

"Surely there are convictions which need no argument?"

"Thank you; but I prefer arguments which produce conviction. Where are you going, Evelyn?"

"I don't know,—no where,—any where,—away from you, Frank. When you talk this way you seem to wither up all my faculties, and I shiver as if a moral frost were on me,—all the noblest aspirations of our nature checked, and the very winter of the human heart begun."

"Do I move you then?" Frank asked with a smile of half triumph already on his lips; but Evelyn checked it by another—and such a one. Had Heaven opened before her gaze, that smile could hardly have been more bright or more undoubting!

"Move me, Frank! No, indeed, you do not; and after all, why should you wish it? Why cast a blank on other minds? Why seek with that ghastly creed of yours (which makes you miserable, though you will not own it) to carry desolation into the midst of plenty?"

"Why, Evelyn, why? Because it is high time that mental power should go free, and vulgar superstitions no longer rule the world."

"By superstition you mean faith I suppose?" asked Evelyn.

"Call it what you will," he answered care-

lessly. "You said just now yourself, that 'a rose by any other name, would smell as sweet;' and superstition, by whatever other title you may choose to style it, to my poor thinking, will be superstition still."

"And call it what you will," cried Evelyn, "the gift is so precious, that they who have it may well hold it fast; while they who have it not will be happy if they can sell all else to get it! Yes, God be thanked for that one great gift of faith, which is the nursing mother of all the highest aspirations and noblest deeds this world can boast of! Oh, Frank! you talk of equality —you rave against the great when they trample on the lowly—you recoil from a society divided into classes, and yet you refuse the only doctrine which gives equality to all, by teaching all, that whatever they may be in time, in eternity their places will be decided by their own actions. Surely the trials of this life would be altogether unendurable if faith did not whisper of that hereafter, which will justify every present dispensation of our God, and more than compensate for all our sorrow."

And again Frank was silent—there was an echo to her words within his bosom to which just then he would not listen.

“ And you will not believe in it; and yet my God!” she said, earnestly clasping her hands together, “ How could we live and smile, and do our duty in this cold, hard world, without it?”

“ I cannot,” he said hastily. “ I must have proof, not feeling. And after all, Evelyn, you have only a geographical faith yourself, for with such a brain as you have, you would have thought quite differently, had you been born on this side the British channel.”

“ Possibly,” said Evelyn, coolly; “ but I am certain I should not have remained half-way as you have done.”

“ What do you mean by that?” said he, unable to refrain from laughing. “ Half-way, indeed! Why there you are at one end the beam with your faith, and what on earth can you have at the other end but me with my—”

“ Sceptism,” said Evelyn, seeing that he hesitated to pronounce the word. “ Nevertheless, in one sense of the term, at least you are still

half-way. You started with faith in a system which a very slight investigation convinced you to be a fallacy, and in searching for a better, fell into that deep gulf, which often lies between the true church and her substitute; since those who once begin to doubt of anything, easily make up their minds to disbelief in all."

"A very Christian in the slough of despond," he answered, with a careless laugh. "And pray how would *your* wisdomship have attempted to clear it?"

"You will laugh at me, I know, and yet I must tell you. I would have put the question to my own heart thus: 'If there be a supernatural it cannot be grasped by the natural, alone. If there be an order of things above reason, it is not to be reached by reason only; though it will be found on examination to be never contrary to it.'"

"Aye," he replied, impatiently, "but that is the very thing that I deny. This supernatural order of things, with its invisible punishments and delights hereafter."

"And yet, even while denying, surely it may

be well to question yourself about them. If there be an eternity—and, oh! Frank, think how much there is in that one word ‘if’—if there be an eternity, what a sentence do you pronounce against yourself by thus dogmatically ignoring it.”

“ And pray what would you do, if you were me,—or, rather, if you were in my position?” Frank asked, half amused, half touched, by her earnestness.

“ I would seek the supernatural, as the supernatural, if it exists at all, only can be discovered. In other words, I would pray. If there be a God, He must be sought, not by the intellect only, but by the heart as well, for both must have been His gift, and therefore both must have been intended to be enlisted in His service. Now, prayer is the natural language of the human heart, especially in doubt and danger, the natural means provided for us that we might soar beyond our nature, therefore, I would pray; and, oh! Frank, above all other things, I would be very humble. With such an ‘if’ before me, I would not rely too much on

the fiat of my own limited human reason, but I would stand in the presence of that possible Being with exceeding reverence and awe. I would pray often that He might reveal Himself to me; I would say, ‘Thou, if thou art, have pity upon me.’ ”

“ A goodly lesson truly. However, notwithstanding your eloquence, Evelyn, I mean to make no further investigation in this weary matter. I love not to stir up muddy waters.”

“ Perhaps you have no great wish to make them clearer,” she answered with a sigh.

“ Haven’t I though,” Frank hastily rejoined. “ Evelyn! Evelyn! I have searched until I was wearied; and it was in the very bitterness of despair that I said to myself at last, ‘ there is no God.’ ”

“ And yet some day you will retract that saying.”

“ Wonderful Sybil! when?”

“ When some one whom your dearly love is dying; when eyes that have ever sought you fondly are closing, to gaze on you no more; when lips that have ever named you tenderly are mur-

muring words you never may hear again in this life; then, Frank, you will turn instinctively to the hope that it is not for ever. But when at last those eyes are closed in earnest, and those lips are mute in death, then hope will be swallowed up in faith, and you will believe. Yes, for you will not be able to persuade yourself that the sister with whom you have played in childhood, or the mother on whose bosom your infancy was pillow'd, has been reserved for no higher destiny than awaits the dumb animals around you, and with your whole soul you will embrace the doctrine of eternity, because you will feel that one too precious for annihilation is enshrined within it."

CHAPTER XIV.

EVELYN waited not to hear Frank's rejoinder to her prophecy; but leaving the library by a matted passage into which the light came streaming through windows of stained glass, entered at once into the room beyond, with just such a quiet adjustment of look and step as indicated the presence of an invalid within. This second sitting-room was fitted up with an evident and graceful attention to all that could soothe the imagination, and withdraw it from the harsher and more distressing circumstances of disease. A few scentless, but bright-hued flowers mingled with fantastic fern and dark-

leaved myrtle were blooming on a stand near the window, and in close companionship with these, a canary-bird, his cage half covered by a white veil of muslin, hopped stealthily from perch to perch, whistling all the time in a sort of mezza voce, as if afraid of disturbing the sleepy quiet of the chamber. An awning before the open window shut out the sun-beams while it suffered the summer-like air of May to enter unrebuked, bearing with it the rich odour of early mimionette and the lemon-like scent of the lily of the valley which grew in clusters amid the turf.

Near this window was a couch upon which Wyllie was now reclining in such a position, as to command a view of all that was fair within the room, and without it. But even in that warm atmosphere (genial as though the day had been stolen from the month of June) an eider down coverlet was disposed carefully about his person. He had been very ill since we first introduced him to our readers, and the traces of long suffering were still visible on his person. His very attitude told of the languor incidental to illness. His hair grown longer in the interval,

fell in heavy curls about his temples, while his face, always fair and delicate to look on, was now so much more fair and delicate than ever, and wore so treacherous a flush besides, that it was difficult to gaze upon him without suspecting that disease was still busy among those bright hues, and death but waiting for his victim. The boy was sleeping when Evelyn first entered, or, at any rate, his eyes were closed. She sat down to wait for his awaking, with something of that unconscious reverence in her manner which we feel for those whose earthly career is about to end, and whose souls, to our human vision, seem half way to the joys of Heaven already. But quietly as she sat or moved, and never were softer movements or more soundless footsteps in the chamber of the sick, than hers, the boy opened his eyes directly. Even in sleep his heart seemed always to warn him of the presence of his sister.

“Hush,” she whispered, laying her hand upon his heavy eye-lids. “Go to sleep again, dear boy, and I will wait till you are quite awakened.”

"I wasn't asleep quite, Evy. I was only dozing while I waited for you. But what's the matter; you look weary?"

"Nothing, Wyllie," she answered with a smile. "I have been talking to Frank, and he has withered me, as he sometimes does, that's all: so I have come here to be refreshed by you."

"Ah, you have come to a bad shop for that, Evelyn, for I don't know how it is, but I seem to grow more hot, and weary, myself every day I live."

His sister laid her hand upon his head and sighed.

"The poor head is hot indeed! But still, Wyllie, I do not feel withered with you as I do with Frank, for bodily illness need not affect the mind, and it only depends upon ourselves to keep our souls so fresh and young, that even in the midst of suffering, we can rejoice in all the bright things the earth contains, and thank God that he has made it fair."

"Yes, Evelyn. And yet do you know I was just thinking before you came in that, for all its beauty, this world would be but a wretched busi-

ness without the idea of another. Just fancy, for instance, what it would be to lay here as I do all day long, if I thought, as Frank does, that there was no brighter life beyond it."

"Yes," said Evelyn, passing her hand thoughtfully across her brow. "That brighter life beyond is indeed all that you, or I, or any of us, have to look to."

"All, Evelyn?"

"All," she repeated, smiling. "Why do you look so wondrous?"

"It is all that I have to look to, certainly," he replied, "because I am next door to a poor cripple, and shall be one altogether soon I suppose. But you, Evelyn?"

"And what has Evelyn got to look to, so very, very bright?" she asked, with a half suppressed sigh the while.

"I don't know exactly," replied Wyllie, a little puzzled perhaps how to explain himself correctly; "but you look so cheery and your eyes are so full of light, that I always think of sunshine the moment you come into the room."

"And what do you think of when I come in?"

cried a ringing voice from the garden; and directly afterwards Lily skipped in through the window, and seated herself on the couch at Wyllie's feet.

"Of a bird in a cage," he answered promptly.

"You are quite right, Wyllie. And, oh! it is such a *little, leetle* cage," Lily responded with a groan.

"And you are such a very, very enormous bird," Evelyn added, smiling.

"I am too large for my cage, that is certain, Evelyn, and so I spoil my feathers and endanger my wings by beating and struggling against the bars."

"And yet to me your cage seems like the wide, wide world itself," said Wyllie, sighing in his turn. "Perhaps you do look like a caged bird when you are sitting by Aunt Montgomerie, Lily, but when I watch you out there in the garden, I always think you must feel like a butterfly in the sunshine, and I cannot help wishing sometimes—"

"What, good boy? That you were a flower for the butterfly to talk to, hey?"

"No, indeed," said Wyllie, laughing, "but that *I also* were a butterfly, and could visit the flowers as well."

"You would be like a very idle insect if you had your wish then," observed Evelyn quietly; "and grievous as it is to see you suffering, I am afraid I should prefer your remaining as you are, to see you leading such a useless life as—"

"As Lily does," retorted the young girl with an air of pique. "Thank you very much for the compliment, Mrs. Evelyn."

"As the butterfly does, I was going to say," she answered, laughing. "I cannot help it, Lily, if you choose to put a personal construction on my words."

"I know," said Wyllie sadly and meekly too, "that it is best for me to be as I am, because if it were not, God would not have ordained it so; but oh, Lily, it must be a wonderfully happy thing for all that, to be able to run about, and dance, and play all sorts of tricks as you do."

"Really, Master Wyllie, to hear you talk, one would fancy I reminded you of a monkey instead

of a butterfly ; but I hope when your new doctor comes, he will set you on your legs again, and enable you to do all sorts of tricksies for yourself, for with all due deference to your superior wisdom, I don't precisely see what particular good you can derive from being stretched out like a corpse all day long upon that sofa."

"Not my body, but my soul," said Wyllie gravely, "perhaps God sends me this sickness for the good of my soul."

Lily laughed outright.

"Oh, your soul, Wyllie; I declare I didn't know you had one. Did you ever see it? and what is it like now, that soul of yours, I wonder."

"Lily," said Evelyn gravely, "I will not have this conversation go on; you know I impose the same rule upon you as upon your brother. There shall be no such discussions in this room at least."

"I forgot; this is your kingdom. Frank and my uncle take good care it shall be your only one. But after all, Wyllie, what harm could have happened to this soul of yours, if your little legs had been able to carry it about, like the

souls of other good boys, hopping and skipping all over the country?"

"Perhaps no harm at all, perhaps a great deal," said Wyllie simply: "if I had the free use of my legs, to go where I liked, and do what I liked, I might have grown up like, Frederick."

"Frederick is much obliged to you, I'm sure," said Lily, her cheek flaming and her eyes flashing; "but I don't myself quite see what harm it would have done you if you had been like him."

"Frederick is a bad boy, Lily."

"Indeed, and pray who informed your worship of that fact?" and Lily glanced indignantly at Evelyn as she asked the question.

"He won't do what papa wants him, Lily."

"That is to say, he won't shut himself up in a musty old counting house," retorted Lily, "and who can blame him? The eagle was made for the eyrie, and would break his neck against the bars of such a cage as yours and mine, Master Wyllie."

"But he's got into bad company too; you know he has, Lily, for I heard Frank saying something about it to you and my aunt only yesterday."

"It does not follow that he is bad company himself, however. He was always generous and disinterested, and I am quite sure that he is so still."

"I am sure that he was," said Evelyn with a heavy sigh; "but it is difficult I fear to feel so certain of what he may have become by this time."

"You were always unkind to Frederick," cried Lily angrily, "even when he was living with us you were for ever finding fault with him."

"Oh, Lily, how unjust you are!" cried Wyllie; "Evy never was, and never could be unkind to Frederick or to any one else, if they were ever so bad, I am certain."

"And I do not remember finding fault with him quite so often as you seem to imagine," Evelyn added gently; "indeed it was at all times rather with his principles, or his lack of them, that I quarrelled than with himself."

"Then you should abuse Frank, and not Frederick, Evelyn. Franzie is answerable for his principles, whatever they are."

"What is that you say about Frank?" said the gentleman in question opening the door, and walking straight up to his young sister, with unmistakable affection beaming from his eyes.

"Oh, Franzie! Franzie! I am so glad you are come," cried Lily, springing up and drawing her brother by both hands towards Wyllie's sofa. "She is abusing Frederick, and it is so very hard, when he is not here to defend himself."

"And where have you lived all your life, my little sister," said Frank, half-bitterly, half-playfully, "not to have learned before now that the absent are always in the wrong."

"The present, however, are far more so at this moment. For you know, Frank—you know," Evelyn repeated more emphatically, "that my censure, if you like to call it so, was far more directed to the root of the evil than to its branch—to the teacher than to the taught."

"Evelyn you are horrid," cried Lily, putting her arm round her brother's neck as if to defend him from a blow. "You are as bad about Frank, as you are about Frederick. You are always abusing them both."

"Am I always abusing Frank?" said Evelyn, fixing her eyes earnestly upon him.

"No, only Frank's teaching," he answered with a good humoured laugh. "There is not fire and faggot enough in it for *your* fancy, I suppose?"

"I have no fancy for fire and faggot, Frank, nor any faith in the efficacy of their teaching either."

"For my part I have faith in nothing," said Lily, with a sort of off-hand liberality that sat strangely enough upon the young girl of fifteen. "It narrows the mind and makes it dance in fetters, as Franzie says; and I don't see the difference either, or why people should not be left to themselves to believe just as much, or as little as ever they please."

"Why?" repeated Evelyn. "For the simple reason, Lily, that this just as much, or as little as ever they please, involves a question of truth; and truth is, or ought to be a gem worth seeking at all hazards."

"Yet there are very good people of all religions, and of none," said Lily. "So after all, what can it signify?"

"Oh, Lily! Do you really mean that it does not signify whether your religion is true or false?" cried Wyllie.

"Because only one out of the many that you speak of can be true remember!" added Evelyn.

"All religions are mere forms," Lily flippantly replied. "And so long as we are true to ourselves, and our moral instincts, there is no need to trouble about the external mode in which we give expression to such feelings."

"As if our instincts were of necessity always moral," groaned Evelyn. "Oh, Frank! Frank! what may you not have to answer for some day for such teaching!"

But either Frank did not heed, or did not hear her; he was looking with such a loving admiration on his child-like pretty, little, fairy sister.

"Who is that yonder?" cried the latter suddenly. "I am sure I saw some one moving among the bushes!"

"Perhaps one of the gardeners," suggested Evelyn.

"Or - the cress-girl?" Wyllie added in the

same breath; but without paying the smallest attention to either of them, Lily darted through the window and was out of sight in a moment.

Evelyn profited by her absence to say reproachfully to Frank :

“ How can you encourage your little sister to talk such nonsense?”

“ Nonsense!” he cried, “ More sense than you talk in a twelvemonth, Evelyn. Lily is my own especial little pupil, and I am very proud of her, I can tell you.”

“ One of your especial pupils has not turned out so marvellously well that you need boast of another, Frank ; and besides, Lily does not really take in one third of your real meaning, but merely repeats your words like a parrot, with a few little poetical embellishments of her own.”

“ She is no worse than other women in that respect,” he retorted ; “ the best of them are but parrots, with just as much tongue, and as little brains withal, to regulate its movements.”

“ All the more reason for not unsettling the little that we have then, especially if it is to be the sole guide of our lives, according to your

theory," Evelyn answered good humouredly, but raising her eyes at the same time to his, with a look so thoughtful and full of soul, that he felt himself rebuked for his idle witticism beneath it.

"Lily has sense enough to see that religion and the moral law are quite distinct and separate things," he observed rather apologetically; "the one being imposed upon us by priestcraft, the other being the spontaneous growth of our brain. So long, therefore, as she rules her conduct by the latter, there is no earthly reason that I can see, why her mind should be trammeled by the former."

"Well, Frank," said Evelyn sadly, "I only hope you will not one day have cause to repent the distinction (fatal to my poor thinking), which you have established between the two, in Lily's mind, but—"

"But what?" asked Frank, seeing that she paused.

Ere the question could be answered, however, Lily reappeared at the window, looking so pale and discomposed, that Evelyn involuntarily ut-

tered an exclamation, while Frank drew forward a chair, into which his sister flung herself, saying, at the same time, by way of explanation:

"It's nothing, nothing at all, only I ran too fast!"

"After the cress girl?" asked Wyllie.

"No, no," she answered, speaking with difficulty and through whitened lips, "there was no one there!"

"No one!" repeated Evelyn, a little incredulously.

"No one," persisted Lily, the crimson blood mounting to her temples as she said it.

"I am quite positive I did see some one behind that clump of laurel," said Frank, looking at his sister with some astonishment, as her cheek changed rapidly from white to red, and from red back again to a deadly paleness.

"There was no one, Frank."

"What have you got in your hand?" asked Wyllie, spying something white, crushed and crumpled beneath her trembling fingers.

"Nothing;—only a scrap of paper;" and Lily tore it nervously to pieces.

"Well, you will believe in ghosts for the future," said Evelyn laughing, "for if you have seen nothing human, you have certainly (judging from your looks at least), had an interview with a spirit."

"And received a ghostly epistle from his ghostship into the bargain," laughed Wyllie, pointing to the particularly minute pieces into which Lily had by this time dissected the paper.

"By the way, talking of letters," cried Lily, evidently happy to have an excuse for changing the subject; "have you had a letter from Dr. Spenser yet; and when is he thinking of paying you a visit?"

"I had a letter yesterday, and he will be here this afternoon."

"Ah, happy you," sighed Lily, "*you* can get your letters on Sundays. When mamma found out that Parkes sometimes managed to smuggle in mine, she desired the postman not to deliver them till Monday, so now I have the pleasure of seeing him walk off with them on the very day one wants them most. Do you know, Evelyn, I am thinking of getting them sent under cover

to you, and of laying an embargo on all my friends to write me gossiping letters every Sunday, as a set off against the large amount of Scriptural lore I am always condemned to swallow on that day."

"Better not, Lily, for I must tell you before hand that I will not give them to you till Monday."

"Why not?" cried the disappointed Lily. "It is very cross in you, Evelyn, for you don't think it a bit wrong, or you would not do it yourself, I know."

"Certainly I don't, Lily; but I am my own mistress to act as I please, while such a course would involve you in an endless system of falsehood and deceit. There are other commandments far more likely to be broken by such an arrangement than that one, my little cousin, and I think we had best say no more about it, don't you?"

"Indeed I don't think any such thing, Evelyn; on the contrary, I think it is very selfish in you to deny me a pleasure you take good care to indulge in yourself."

"Another time perhaps you will see it in a different light, dear Lily," Evelyn was beginning kindly; but Lily had again walked through the window, and was out of sight in a moment.

"I think you are too hard upon Lily," said Frank, ever ready to take up the cudgels for his little sister. "Sunday is a very weary day for her, and I often wonder she does not rebel outright."

"My dear Frank, I am very sorry for your sister, and it is sad indeed to see the day which should bring peace to the soul as well as quiet to the body, made irksome and distasteful by the regulations of an unwise zeal. Still, I am sure you will agree with me that any amount of weariness is better to be endured, than the risk of training so young a mind into habits of deceit."

"Of course, certainly," repeated Frank; "but I was thinking when I spoke of your general tone towards Lily. It always seems to me as if in your own mind you judged her harshly."

"I hope I do not, Frank, for I am sure I love her dearly. Yet, if you urge me, I must say that the tone of free-thinking declamation in which

you encourage her to indulge, does jar very painfully on my feelings; not the matter only, but the manner also, which seems so unsuited to the modesty of a young girl."

"That is all along of your poetical imagination," Frank answered the more impatiently, perhaps, that his own heart whispered there were some grounds for the reproach.

"No, Frank," said Evelyn, earnestly. "It is not poetry, but a sacred truth I tell you. When once you have destroyed her reverence for higher things by accustoming her to theorize upon them at pleasure, you have also destroyed that innate modesty of nature which, teaching her to watch over her secret thoughts quite as carefully as her exterior actions, is to the mind of the young girl what its bloom is to the grape—a charm as easily brushed off, and as impossible to replace."

"Bloom on the grape! innate modesty of nature! reverence for higher things!" cried Frank, ironically. "Really, Evelyn, you must excuse me, but if you are not conscious that you are talking poetry now, it can only be because like

the man who talked prose in the play, you have been doing it all your life without knowing it. However, I cannot stay to argue it out with you, for I have letters to write for the post, so you and Lily must settle it the best way you can between you."

Frank left the room as he finished speaking. Nevertheless, though he affected to treat the matter lightly, there was something in his own soul which responded to Evelyn's objections, and at times, even made him tremble, lest his teaching might one day prove as fatal to Lily, as it had done before to Frederick. For it had happened to him more than once to feel already that when ever his sister and Evelyn were brought more particularly in contact with each other, the latter showed to the most advantage. His was a nature to appreciate the wide difference between her earnest love of truth and the daring hap-hazard of Lily's random speech; and, moreover, he could not help acknowledging to himself that his young sister's tone of thought occasionally degenerated into something of unwomanly boldness, while that of Evelyn never out-stepped the

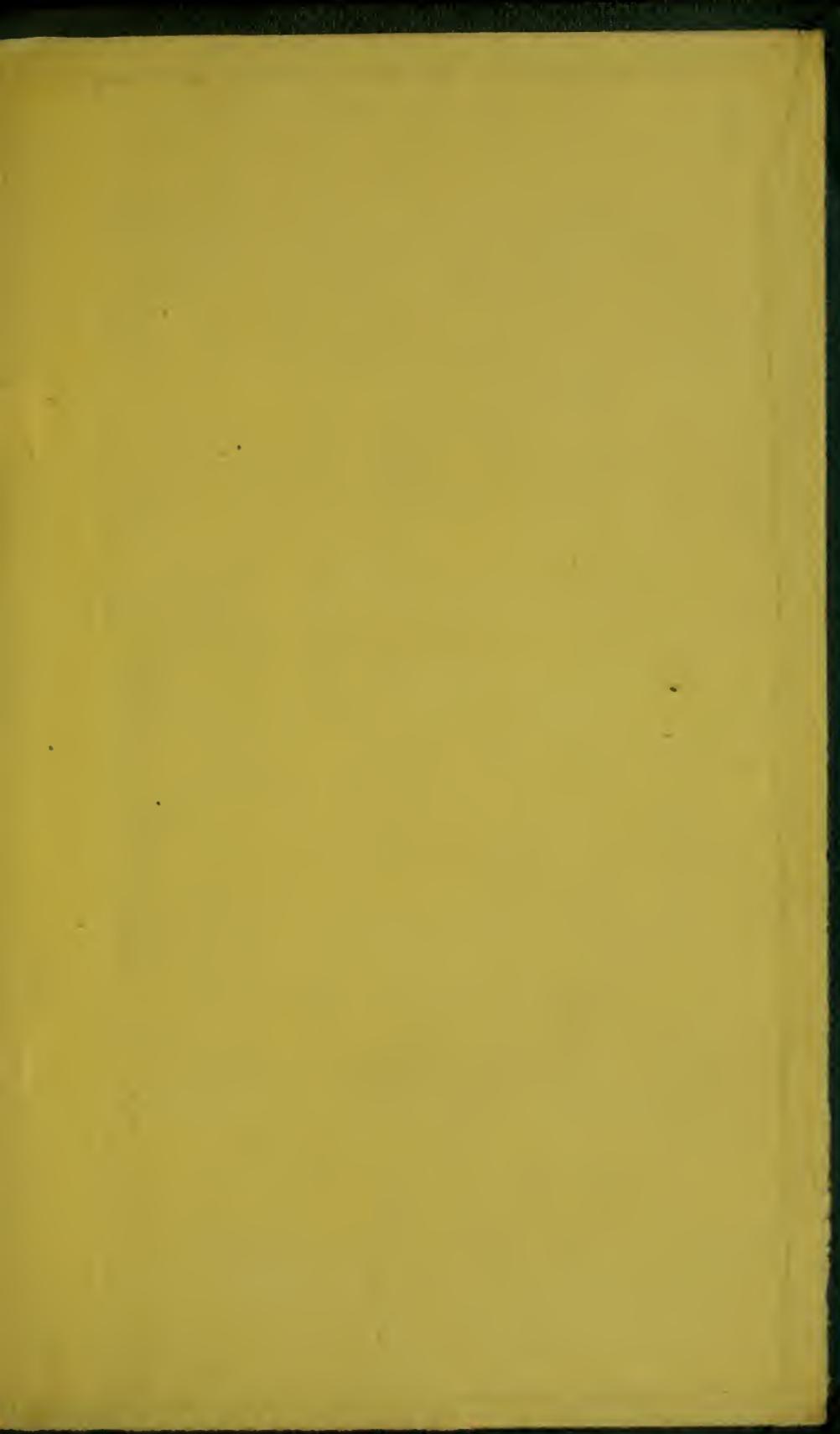
modesty which he himself loved heartily as the best attribute of woman; albeit, he chose to ignore the source from whence it was derived most surely, in the restraint which religion puts almost unconsciously to herself upon her.

With such a lurking consciousness in his mind, Evelyn's observations disturbed him, long after she herself had forgotten that she had made it. Unfortunately, however, he would not argue even with himself about it—purposely he turned his thoughts another way—purposely he closed his eyes—Lily was his sister—his pupil—his cherished darling—the echo besides of his own pet opinions; and so he closed his eyes. He *would* not blame her or reprove her—he *could* not without being in contradiction to himself.

END OF VOL. I.







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